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EZRA
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Ezra the Mormon

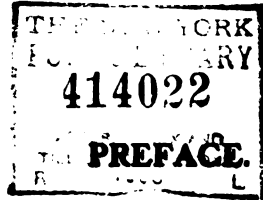
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Author of "The Vision at the Savoy"
"Emma Hamilton's Miniature,"
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For fear this book should be mistaken entirely for have asked my publishers to insert a few explanations which did not appear in the first edition. It is only that some readers should accept certain startling revelations as inventions, rather than reality. Many people believe the old doctrine of polygamy has been stamped out, the benefit of such I would have it known that my story the exact words of to-day's secret polygamous marriage, and the blasphemous initiation rites, with the exception of certain parts which were not fit to place before our public.

A writer in *The Globe* has just informed us in a column on Mormonism that five or six mission centres, and thirty missionaries, are at work in London alone at the moment. He gives further interesting particulars and has permission to quote:—

"The Latter Day Saints, as they prefer to be called, were able to congratulate themselves at their conference held in London this autumn on an increase in the number of conversions in the Metropolis, significant and alarming. We have good reason to believe that the Metropolitan Police are aware, if the police of religion are not, of the snares which are being laid for the credulous and weak-minded. The proselytes who are being led into a land where the similitude of the apostolic age has been revived will soon find themselves woefully deceived."

In "Esra the Mormon" I have endeavoured to present the Mormon view of life, absolutely drawn from a fair standpoint, while the tragic occurrences in London are taken from facts. The story has been called "a riot of rationalism." Unfortunately, a great part of the rationalism is true.

WINIFRED C

November, 1907.

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EZRA THE MORMON.

CHAPTER I

" EXPRESS TRAIN SPEED "

" THAT girl will come to harm sooner or later," said Ralph Sutton. He paused, and fixed his eyes on his wife with a steadfast look, expressive of prophecy. Then he added, in monotonous repetition,— " to harm ! "

He had been talking somewhat excitedly of a wild, puzzlingly beautiful daughter, in whom he found it difficult to recognise his close, intimate, human relationship.

In Thora there was a strong vein of poetry, at variance with her father's matter of fact outlook upon life. She might have been born of some union of nymphs, so wayward and strange were her moods.

Mrs. Sutton retained the shadow of a heritage long past. Her tired eyes could never lose a light which once kindled passion in men's hearts. Even now, emotions stirred by Thora's actions could bring a rush of colour to the mother's faded cheeks, and revive the bloom of youth.

"The worst of it is," continue man's cold, unmusical voice, "you, Pa encourage her. It is impossible to make her see that Thora has any faults. You are her stumbling block, instead of her salvation."

Mrs. Sutton replied in the low characteristic of her general charm.

"The girl must have friends, my dear Ralph, we are too old for her. As she is with Mrs. Barcroft, a bright companion, and very kind. Why should I grudge the child those crumbs of happiness? You cannot cage up a young life. You must see that Thora is born for something better than a humdrum existence in this West Kensington flat."

The tenderly modulated voice quivered suddenly with bitterness long suppressed. The cage had held her own soul through weary years. An everlasting consideration of money, the dwarfing grip of poverty still on the eager spirit of the woman, who had been broken in health, lived only to see the child she loved raised to a better estate.

"If I thought that Thora merely annoyed herself, I should not mind," muttered Mrs. Sutton mysteriously. "Personally, Pa, I do not trust Mrs. Barcroft."

"You're always suspicious of everybody."

"And I am generally right. You

tional people are carried away by temperament, while I, fortunately, weigh matters, and so steady your mental balance. Thora should be watched, and protected from herself."

Mrs. Sutton's curiosity awoke.

"What are you hinting at, Ralph?" she asked.

"You spoke as if I disapproved of the ordinary pleasures a girl naturally expects and desires; but is Thora the average young woman, contented with tea parties, and drives in the park?"

A startled look leapt into Mrs. Sutton's eyes, her lips trembled as they framed the one word—"No."

"Thora," he continued, "has an unusual and highly imprudent love of investigation. She is interested in various meetings, which I understand are of a religious order. In fact, her mind inclines towards the serious. One day she is at a gathering of Christian Scientists, often she will slip off to worship in a Roman Catholic church. She finds excitement in a great meeting conducted by General Booth at the Albert Hall, or a lecture on 'The Simple Life.' The occult, it seems, has also a special fascination, and I fear that certain meetings have been attended which are detrimental to a girl of Thora's age. I do not care to name their nature. I only say—use your influence to keep her at home."

"I have always hoped," said Pa "that Thora's life would run along lines. I never allowed her to grow minded. I know Mrs. Barcroft has to her of Positivism, they went together the church or hall where these people gather to worship genius—an highest form of mankind. Thora was interested, she is too sensible to let matter touch her soul."

A strained expression on the face might have warned his wife he keeping something back, but she was through the window, wondering when would return. A bright streak of sun gave her a startlingly ethereal appearance he remembered, with a pang, that at the first warning of the end had sounded a faint note which sometimes, in his dream, swelled to a thundering death knell. Would it trouble her to-day? There was always a shadow of trouble for bad news, and possibly he misjudged Thora. Suddenly Mrs. Sutcliffe's eyes twinkled, and a smile broke on her lips.

"Look," she cried, pointing down the street.

A carriage drew up, and a girl stepped out.

"Can it really be Thora?" she gasped. Impossible to mistake the graceful figure, but the dainty clothes were absolutely familiar.

" EXPRESS TRAIN SPEED " II

" She is all in white, like a bride."

The words held a thrill of romance.

Mr. Sutton moved to the window, his curiosity aroused.

Together the father and mother watched Thora as she bade Mrs. Barcroft good-bye.

A few moments later, Youth, with the *joie de vivre* of health, and the happiness of appreciation, burst into the room. Thora seemed to brighten the very atmosphere, and enhance commonplace objects around her with mystical meaning. She gave out a magnetism which even the vampiring influence of her father could not destroy. In the past she had often listened to his prosaic reasoning—with the terrible fear that he would drag her down to earth, but the sight of his disapproving air failed to wound her to-day. She almost flung herself on her mother, as she kissed the pale face which was smiling now.

" Mrs. Barcroft gave me these lovely clothes—she felt sure you wouldn't mind. They came from Paris. We had tea at the Carlton, and Ezra was there. Ye gods, what an intellect! He takes my breath away."

The words came tumbling from her lips, like hurried notes of music.

" Ezra ? " muttered Mr. Sutton. " Who is he ? "

" We call him Ezra in private; I really

mean Mr. Dyer, Mrs. Barcroft's An friend."

Thora kept fast hold of her m hand, as the tired woman drank words with silent satisfaction.

"I should have thought you be too proud to accept clothes fr acquaintance," replied Mr. Sutton, l Thora up and down. "You were enough dressed before, your mother' is always excellent."

The girl laughed softly.

"We often talk of ladders, Mur I," she answered, with a fond look delicate mother, "ladders and wi can't fly very far yet, but Mrs. Barc helping me upwards, rung by rung, l me perhaps to great experiences."

The man left them with a dis shrug of his stout shoulders. He individuality in a woman, it had attracted him once in his life, when P; dazzled him into believing he apprec character.

"Now, Thora—tell me—tell me e thing."

Mrs. Sutton seemed hungering for joyful companionship of one who had in touch with the outer world, as she ad Mrs. Barcroft's costly gifts.

"The everything comprises so lit and so much. A change of raimen blossoming forth into life's flower ga

There was a time, wasn't there, Mums, when I used to try and be so very spiritual, but oh! I feel just now as if the very angels would be better for a fling occasionally."

"Are you going to meet Ezra Dyer again?"

Thora nodded a cheerful assent.

"Yes, we are sworn friends. I never knew friendship happen so quickly, it was almost instantaneous."

"Americans are a swift people," replied Mrs. Sutton, who knew more of the world than her daughter imagined. "They fall in love at sight, while Englishmen want to put on glasses, and stare for a conventional period of time. The Britisher may be the wiser of the two, but a slow, calculating nature is very difficult for people of your disposition and mine."

"I know—poor little Mums!"

Thora pressed the thin hand with a sympathy which vibrated through every nerve.

"He is coming to see you," the girl continued, now a trifle shyly. "I told him about our home, so he will not expect a gilded palace. Mrs. Barcroft has the knack of attracting interesting people, but though she is so familiar with talent, she says Ezra is the cleverest man she has ever met. He is frequently at her house, and often talks of me. That is why she gave me these lovely clothes. She wanted him to see me

at my best. She thought something happen, she did not tell me what.

"Do you think you could ca him?" asked the mother, and st her manner became nervous and eag

Thora threw back her head, ing a moment absolutely still. muscle of her body suggested concen The question was one she dared not hurriedly. Her attitude revealed her Sutton as something more than a impressionable girl, she was already a weighing her own opinions in order to truly.

"I should care terribly under a cumstances, but I would marry him on condition he changed some of hi to suit mine."

"You are very decided," laugh mother, amused and yet relieved. "I u stand he is a man who has travelled mendously, and knows his world, I thoroughly cosmopolitan, and is ne middle age. Would it be quite fa dictate, when he has so much to give he offers you a brilliant future, a li luxury and even power, for money n power, could you not put up with his se convictions?"

She felt it her duty to state this of the case, though she could not bea thought of losing Thora. The mother a

“EXPRESS TRAIN SPEED” 15

from the daughter's standpoint, putting self aside.

“Even middle age (he is thirty-five, that's older for an American than an Englishman), could alter convictions, if the passion were true,” said the girlish voice. “No sacrifice—no love, is my theory.”

“Then where would your sacrifice come in?”

For a moment Thora's eyes grew dim, a spasm of pain passed over the smiling face, making it almost old, with an odd twin beauty to match the faded features of her still attractive mother.

“I should have to leave you,” she whispered. “Not only the great cities would lie between us, but the awful sea. It seems as if it would be almost too far for thought, as though one were in heaven, and the other on earth. Letters, of course, would carry certain communications backwards and forwards—backwards and forwards—with horrible monotony, closely written sheets just long enough to tantalise, and make one long to hear or say more. How should we bear it? We have been so much to each other. Could you endure the separation, Mums?”

“It is the fate of women who have borne children,” answered Mrs. Sutton slowly. Her lips were very dry, and she spoke with effort. “They give up all they love to the stranger—when he comes. He just claims

his kingdom, and the old inhabitant retire. I have pondered these things to my heart—like Mary, steeling myself for the hour when the world would rob me of my ewe lamb. Whenever I hear the bells, I wonder if some poor mother has been crucified, and yet the mother is really glad, she rejoices over her sacrifice for by them she has bought her child a cup of pleasure."

"Then it's sacrifice right on to the cross for in time the bride may have to follow the same path."

They were silent a moment, vaguely conscious of the other's presence. That was their way to talk fancifully to themselves and try and see even the poetry of suffering in a hidden beauty in every pang of grief.

"Do you remember," said Thora, "the old gipsy last summer, who looked so sad in her face, and then burst out crying? She was going to tell me my fortune, but after one long gaze, she sobbingly refused to take my money, and turned away meekly. 'Those eyes will see far—too far—from the camp of the enemy.'"

Mrs. Sutton was not superstitious. She had little faith in the gipsy woman, and explained away the words lightly.

"She was old and hysterical, and she had been drinking."

"In which state the tongue is apt to utter truths," added Thora, but

into laughter at her own expense. “Ezra would like me to see far, especially with the eye of imagination. He can express his thoughts in a way which almost creates vision. He wants me to love his country, so he paints a vivid picture, which calls me against my better judgment.”

“A picture of wealth and sunshine?” queried Mrs. Sutton.

Thora nodded assent.

“Luxury,” she whispered, “on a scale my mind can hardly conceive, and gaiety enough to almost rob a woman of her senses. I have never read any description of Utah—Salt Lake City is a closed book to me, but he dictates, and the story clings to the mind and fascinates. Ezra can make you feel the very atmosphere, the joy and beauty of his home. The enormous streets, the great houses, all spell riches. Mining, cattle grazing, and building bring wealth to the population. You never see a beggar, the city is gayer than Paris, with dancing-halls open all night, theatres, and amusements of every kind. That does not attract me, but I like picturing the scene. Every house is surrounded with flowers, and even their large stations, like Charing Cross, are lovely gardens full of roses.”

Mrs. Sutton closed her eyes. She was asking herself: “Is it well with the child?”

Her husband’s words came sharply back, ringing in her brain: “Thora should be

protected. Use your influence to keep her at home. That girl will come to harm.

"Will you tell me," she said, "what ideas Mr. Dyer must alter yours, should you marry him? Yes, I never force a confidence, so don't if I ask too much."

Thora shrank away, with a blanching of her face, and began unbuttoning her long white gloves, them off finger by finger, as if her interest in life were centred on the

She was thinking with the rapid brain sharpened by recent contact with Ezra.

At last she spoke.

"If he won't change," she said, "I would rather we both forgot him and that you never knew why I left him out of my life. You must remember, Mums, that short as our acquaintance has been, my heart is sore and aching for him. He just stole my soul away with his intelligence and charm. It was coming into contact with the sun on that day; I felt the rays, and blossomed with life. I must always be grateful to you for making me feel like that."

"I understand. I only asked if I could help you. The French say there is only one bell, only hears one. There are two sides to every question. I hope you are in the right."

“EXPRESS TRAIN SPEED” 19

An expression of absolute certainty on Thora's face gave Mrs. Sutton confidence in the girl's judgment. She no longer allowed herself to remember Ralph's disturbing hints. His life, running on strictly conventional lines, was stamped as a failure in the brain of the wife he had dragged down to his own limited world, peopled by social and mental nonentities. But for a chance friendship, Thora might have remained fettered with the submerged. To see her placed in a different setting gave Mrs. Sutton a sense of living her youth again in another.

Before Thora could reply, the door opened, and to her utter amazement, Ezra Dyer was announced.

A tall dark man, with something of the gipsy in him, advanced towards Mrs. Sutton, uttering a quick apology for the lateness of his call, and speaking with the confidence of one who knows his ground—

“Your daughter said I might come, but she little thought I would take such prompt advantage of her invitation. Not an hour ago we were enjoying a very pleasant tea together, and I believed then I should be in England for some months. Unfortunately, since I parted from Miss Sutton, I received an urgent call back to my country. Knowing I have only a few days left in which to arrange my numerous affairs, I seized this opportunity of finding you at home.”

"Only a few days!"

Thora echoed the words with an expression of pained surprise.

He noticed the droop of the mouth which gave the key to the arresting individuality. He had loved at first for a thousand differing reasons masses of soft hair through which he could run his fingers, the outline of his chiselled throat, the occasional spark of humour in her eyes. It surprised him that a face could suggest at the same time strength and womanliness, while he had taken an almost masculine view of life in his untrammelled mind. Now he could have clasped her feet with gratitude for this open expression of grief.

Mrs. Sutton was quick to criticise the new comer. Instinctively, she felt that the very nature to attract Thora—a nature whose eyes the power of dominion. He had gained success by the thoroughness which lay beneath his every action and personality, while it pleased, often unconsciously imparted an actual sensation of fear baffling description. Mrs. Sutton said she could no more explain the man in words than she could have painted him on canvas. She fancied this visit held a clearly conceived purpose, little dreaming how her suspicions were to be realised.

He took a seat facing Thora's and with fearless eyes addressed her

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fascinating, but rather nasal voice, unlike the accent usually associated with Americans.

"Time," he said, pleasantly, "makes slaves of us all, and occasionally drives us so quickly that we have little space in which to pause and consider conventions. At the present moment I must rush to the goal, or lose all. I am here to try and persuade your daughter to come to my country, and also to ask if you will give her up, should she consent to be my wife."

Mrs. Sutton gazed in wide-eyed wonder from the stranger to the girl, then she blinked her lashes to make sure she was awake.

"If Thora's future is to be decided at this express train speed," she said, "I think I had better leave you two alone to talk it over. You won't be surprised that I am bewildered, since we have not many excitements here. It is also somewhat difficult for me, knowing you so slightly, to approve or disapprove, but I feel we should get on."

She clasped Ezra's hand affectionately. His brave, open face touched her, there was an appeal in his eyes which betrayed deep feeling.

Thora spoke no word. She stood like a woman turned to stone, and watched her mother go.



CHAPTER II

"YOU CURSED MORMON"

MRS. BARCROFT was seated at her table in her Louis Quinze boudoir, perusing over a letter received that morning. The previous day, when she and Thora had seen Ezra Dyer at the Carlton, he appeared in the best of spirits, now he wrote as follows:—

"Don't forget, dear Friend, to promise to call and see me to-day, the better, for though a great amount of correspondence chains me to the house, I am like a caged bear, for I have a heavier weight upon my mind, of which I can only speak, since words written are so dangerous. You, to whom I have confessed so much of my inner life, will guess I mean. Bring Thora with you. She has promised to call early at your house. I charge you not to come without her. I value the reason of your poor dis-

"Ez

Muriel Barcroft was a woman of sympathetic interest in others, and excelled as a friend. The ever susceptible chords of her large heart vibrated

thousand pangs for suffering humanity. She had not a jealous or unkind thought for any living soul, she loved and was loved, gathering around her a store of gratitude for kindly acts, tactfully bestowed. For long she sat and pondered over Ezra's communication, glancing with eager curiosity at Thora, when later on the girl was ushered into the pretty, pale tinted room, with its scent of violets, and restful air of luxury.

"You must forgive me for coming at this hour," Thora declared, in a voice which betrayed her hidden emotion, as Mrs. Barcroft kissed her.

"My dear, I am only too delighted you have taken me at my word. I told you to remember the old warning, to visit your friend often, for thorns and brushwood obstruct the path where no man treads."

She pushed aside her papers, and drew the girl to a sofa, where inviting cushions suggested repose.

"I hope you can stay some time," she added, "because I want to take you driving with me this morning. I promised to call on Mr. Dyer; he is staying at the house of some millionaire friend, who is a great patron of sculpture and art. The owner is away at present, but I am to be allowed to wander round, and enjoy his collection of treasures."

"Will Mr. Dyer be there?" asked Thora quickly.

"Yes, he wants to see you."

"Then he wrote?"

Mrs. Barcroft smiled assent.

"I can hardly tell you what has happened since yesterday." Thora turned her face away, she was struggling with her tears.

"Perhaps I can guess. Ezra has asked you to be his wife."

Thora made a sign of assent, she spoke with difficulty.

"He came to our house to say he must return to America immediately. Mother left us to talk alone. I told him honestly that I returned his love, but I refused to embrace his religion. I stipulated he must change his faith, or give me up."

"Change his faith! He would never do that. Don't you remember his face when he addressed that meeting, barely a fortnight ago, before you had ever spoken to him? You thought he was like a prophet—we called his exhortations 'words of fire.' He set every nerve quivering, and stirred his listeners to a pitch of excitement I shall never forget. We said we were broad minded enough to see the beauty and charm of all religions, to appreciate schools of thought that could never touch our own lives. We admired him for his eloquence and sincerity."

"Yes, but men sometimes alter their creed when the motive power is strong

enough. Ezra's love for me is greater than I expected. For my sake he would escape—if he dared."

"What would he have to fear? Surely a man may please himself. Can there be any penalty for a change of views?"

Thora shuddered, and whispered the one word—"Death!"

Mrs. Barcroft put up her hands to her forehead, a sudden throb of pain struck her temples like a blow. In civilised London it was impossible to credit the truth of such a statement.

"He would be under the ban," Thora continued, "and that means more than you or I can understand; but he said quite enough to terrify me. I know now the choice remains with me, for Ezra has promised that I should be his only wife. His sect have still a secret torture chamber for offenders against the faith. How could I risk his life, after his description of the inquisition of the Elders? If they condemn a man to death, there is no escape, he must die. I could not live to feel I had placed him in danger. I must adopt his belief, or give him up."

Her face was pale and set as she uttered the words.

"I cannot offer an opinion," murmured Mrs. Barcroft, "for I really know so little of his religion, but it seems a terrible affair."

"Ezra will send me books of instruc-

tion : then I shall be able to judge Thora with a shiver. "Creeds have my stumbling block from a child never orthodox. Sometimes I think been placed in wrong surroundings, am made for another kind of life."

"What do your people think this?"

"Mother knows there is a deal in the way, but I have not breathed word religion. She told my father of Mr. Dyer's visit last night, as he had to be in rather a difficult mood. He has been lecturing her about me during afternoon. She means to speak of it when I am not at home. She will say that Ezra is a friend of your wealthy, very charming, and has a chance to marry him."

As Thora spoke, a servant brought that Mr. Dyer had telephoned to soon he might expect Mrs. Barcroft Miss Sutton.

"The carriage is waiting now. go at once, Thora?"

Mrs. Barcroft sprang up eagerly. She loved excitement. Human beings were an outlet for the fund of sympathy she held stored in her kindly nature.

The girl readily agreed.

Together they passed into the bright of a spring morning. As they drove

the park few would have guessed that the girl in white was hovering upon the brink of a great life drama, asking her soul what the mystery of living meant, and whether she had been born for Heaven or Hell. She looked so young, so flower-like, while the tragedy surrounding her gave the observant eyes an expression of big wonder, adding to her face a piquant mystery, in which suffering blended with the beautifying influence of waking passion. They talked little, Mrs. Barcroft divining that silence was better for Thora.

When at last they drew up at the house which had been placed at Ezra's disposal, Mrs. Barcroft pressed Thora's hand, and whispered :—

"I shall show you I can be a good chaperone. The rooms here have been copied, by the best decorative artists, from the palace at Versailles. There is also a collection of wonderful china. I am mad about such things, so you can dismiss me from your mind."

They entered an imposing hall, and passed through a line of reception-rooms, with white carved walls and ceilings, broken by a soft colour scheme of rose, gold, and green. Beyond, Ezra awaited them in the library. He came quickly forward, and, without a word of explanation to Mrs. Barcroft, kissed Thora on the forehead. He seemed part of the sombre room, with its

book-laden walls, and funereal oak. eyes showed signs of a sleepless night was an interesting figure of gloom.

"So good of you," he said, with a flash of his old humour, "to visit the damned man in his cell. I feel—leave England, and my dear friends pass to outer darkness, though I try one of the loveliest spots on God's earth. A month ago, I would have given a drop of blood in my veins to see my brothers in Salt Lake, but now I wish to wash my hands of the old life—for the sake of one little girl. You must look on me as mad, for I'm under the spell of a girl's lunacy—this child has enchanted me."

He drew Thora within the circle of his arm, and gazed with frank confidence at Mrs. Barcroft.

"And I am responsible!" she said.

He acknowledged the remark with a slight inclination of his head.

"Yes, and the responsibility remains, alas! until a more favourable opportunity. I charge you to guard her for me. One day we shall be one. How, I cannot say, but a love like mine is born once in a century, and does not spring to life for nothing. You must agree with me, you must believe in your heart that I speak the truth."

"What a pity you cannot both have her!" said Mrs. Barcroft, with growing uneasiness.

“ It is possible, you know, to forget : to crush even the most soul inspiring and romantic love, if wisdom tells you to do so is a necessity.”

“ Ah, yes ! ” he said quickly. “ The devil has made it easy to kill all that is beautiful in the world. Nothing is more lovely than life, but you can destroy it with one little shot from a gun. If we were to stifle this passion because of the difficulties in our path, we should be poor earth worms indeed ; we should never deserve another thrill of happiness.”

Despite her good nature, Muriel Barcroft grew suddenly impatient with the man. She felt he ought to spare Thora, and give her up, yet at the same time she admired his persistency. She suspected people of his persuasion : “ the Latter Day Saints,” as she had heard them called, always tried to win disciples to their faith. She wondered if he had exaggerated the stories of personal danger to himself, should he, as an Elder, change his belief, to marry a girl in Christian England. He had told Thora that the restaurants, theatres, and streets of Salt Lake, were patrolled by spies in the pay of the “ Saints,” and a man or woman safe bound in that city would be as secure as in a Chinese temple. She trembled for the fate of the girl who felt Providence had placed her in wrong surroundings, and that

the destiny of some strange untried awaited her.

Suddenly Muriel remembered promise.

"I am going to inspect the old and paintings," she said, "and please think it necessary to accompany me. not be very long, and then I must see safely home, for I doubt if her would approve of my bringing her at all."

As Mrs. Barcroft fluttered away a gentle rustle of silken skirts, Ezra Thora's hands in his own, and looked steadily.

"You shall do nothing with you shut," he said, "but give the faith. Read the books I will send you, always my voice in your ear, know prayers are drawing you out to the Beautiful. I will write you full of the home I can prepare, if you have enough to throw in your lot with. You shall live like a queen, and splendour to the day of your death. I can offer you a full and dazzling existence but I don't want to tempt you with considerations. Think only of my love, an all-embracing spirit, which will follow and hold you!"

"If it were not for mother, I come with you now," whispered with a little quiver of joy or fear, he

not which. "But she is weak and ill, the doctor fears she has not long to live, and she is always in pain. If anything happened to her, I could not stay with my father. All our ideas differ. He never understood me, and I—well, I understand him only too well. He sees one side of a subject always, the side of the majority, he follows public opinion with such unfailing monotony that it wears away hope. If he had one original thought I could forgive him. It makes me furious that he dared to marry mother—that was the basest thing he ever did. He pretended to agree with her views of life until after the wedding, then she found all his ideas were exactly the reverse to what she had supposed. He believed he could mould her! It was marriage by capture, and as retribution I was born—the child of my mother, without a trace of his blood. We have been strangers always father and I. It's pitiful, but true. I merely tell you this that you may know the worst of me. I have never spoken so plainly of him to any one before. Even my mother has no idea of my feelings on the subject."

Thora had let herself go, talking quickly, with an abandon which made him fancy she was already his own. He could picture the desperate hours when the frail little woman who bound her to England had passed away. Then this wild spirit, which held

for him the very essence of romance, beat its wings against the cramping old surroundings, and fly to the offered, to the city of flowers and lo

"I read the history of a great r in your mother's eyes," he said. "let conventions drag you down, pr her experience. Rise above the maxims of petty people."

"Listen! Whose voice is that

Thora turned suddenly pale, asked the question in a quick v Loud tones of wrath had broken up conversation. The rasping, and now sound, drew nearer—in that awful as they waited side by side, fac library door.

"What business had you to be here?"

The fierce question reached the piercing distinctness.

"Ah! it's all very well," in a some explanation uttered in soft, accents. "You women are all fools the nose by any blackguard who bring his vile creed into London, view to tainting the populace. daughter is alone with him! God—my daughter!"

A big British boot of plebeia kicked open the folding doors wh the library from a white music-ro Ralph Sutton strode in, transforme

his usual self to a man possessed by uncontrolled fury. His naturally sallow face had deepened to a fierce crimson; his eyes protruded, fixing their gaze with hatred and loathing upon the dignified figure of Ezra Dyer.

Mrs. Barcroft ran to Thora, but the girl hardly seemed to notice her presence. She was gazing at her parent, with wondering curiosity, marvelling at his changed appearance.

"You cursed Mormon!" he shouted. "How dare you set your foot in England, to entrap the unwary with your filthy laws of licence and intrigue. Take this—for insulting my daughter with a vile proposal of so-called marriage."

He raised a thick stick he held in his hand. As it trembled above Ezra, the quick-witted American caught the blow on his shoulder—a blow desperate enough to have cracked his skull, had it fallen, as intended, on the offender's head.

He made no sign of feeling pain; he just stood and fixed his assailant with an eye of steel.

"Yes, I am a Mormon," he said, "and proud of the fact. Besides being a Mormon (he dwelt on the word with lingering fondness) I am an Elder, and have been sent to preach our religion in Pagan London, the city of scant prayer. Your faith, compared to ours, is a mere bubble; but I respect

your grey hairs, and your ignorance much to detain you with my views. for your age, and your relationship to woman I love, I would have shown that 'a cursed Mormon' is as good a at dealing blows as a righteous English gentleman who forgets his dignity friend's house. Mind you, I'm your friend for all your hatred of me, and am still to offer my life, and the single love of my heart, to this sweet lady who loves me in return."

He put out his hand to Thora. Mr. Sutton sprang between them with a smothered oath.

"Touch her at your peril!" he cried.

"No," replied Ezra. "I touch her as yours."

He laid an iron hand on Mr. Sutton's sturdy chest, sweeping him aside with an apparent effort. Almost simultaneously he rang a bell, and slipped his arm through Thora's. The girl looked dazed and defenceless. She tried to speak, but her trembling lips failed to frame a word.

"She's mesmerised," half shrieked her father, turning in terror to Mrs. Barton. "Can't you see he's working an evil spell? The police on him, I say. Mark my words, the English Press shall ring with this. A Mormon at large in London, beguiling young girls—entrapping his prey—to the ruin of the race!"

“YOU CURSED MORMON” 35

souls. Oh, Heavens! and my child a victim!”

Ralph Sutton's words were broken by a dry sob. The sound brought Thora sharply to her senses. She went forward, waving Ezra aside, and took her father by the hand.

“It's all a mistake,” she said firmly. “You misjudge Mr. Dyer, he has never harmed me. He paid me the high compliment of asking me to be his wife—his only wife. You owe him a deep and sincere apology.”

“And you, Thora, are green enough to believe him, to credit the falsehood with which he has baited his trap. Share him with a dozen others if you like. I always said you would go to the dogs, but don't talk rubbish about being the ‘wife’ of a Mormon Elder; that isn't the word.”

A tall footman of athletic build answered the bell. He seemed to know instinctively that something was wrong, and came to help his master's friend, if assistance were required.

Ezra Dyer bowed to Mrs. Barcroft, and extended his hand in farewell, speaking with studied politeness.

“Very sorry that you and Miss Sutton must leave me so soon,” he said. “Are you giving Mr. Sutton a lift?”

The cool dismissal set the older man's blood boiling with renewed heat.

"Confound his insolence," he muttered as Mrs. Barcroft murmured that she be delighted to offer Mr. Sutton a seat in her carriage.

"Come, father, come, you are not self," whispered Thora, in feverish to get away, as she cast a grateful towards Ezra.

Exhausted from his utter lack of control, the outraged British parent asked his daughter to lead him from the room. She glanced back to catch a farewell look of her lover's upright figure and set her teeth. He looked as calm and collected as she had first seen him at a Mormon meeting only two weeks ago. Muriel Barcroft's words came back to her with a flash of memory: "Let us go as a joke; I am not one of the leaders, the handsomest and most imaginable, with the manners of a prince." "Was this the end of the joke," she asked herself, "or only the beginning?" She heard the library door close, felt convinced in her heart that Ezra was kneeling in prayer.

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CHAPTER III

THE SNAPPING OF A BRAIN

MRS. BARCROFT had never experienced a more uncomfortable journey than the drive back to her house with Mr. Sutton and Thora. She was conscious of being the cause of all the trouble, and this guilty sensation made it difficult for her to appear at ease. She mildly tried to conciliate the war-like attitude of the man who still breathed out threatenings against Ezra Dyer.

"I wish the hound would have me up for assault," he muttered, "that would be one way of getting it into the papers."

Mrs. Barcroft reminded him that under such circumstances Thora's name would be bandied on the public tongue.

"Surely," she added, "your policy should be to protect your daughter from any breath of scandal. Such a proceeding would be very damaging to any young girl."

Mr. Sutton muttered that others, beside himself, had been neglectful of Thora's reputation.

Mrs. Barcroft was not prepared to accept such rudeness, and fixed her wide blue eyes

full upon him, with a light of repro their shining depths.

"To my knowledge," she said, "has been carefully guarded. I was near her to-day, in the adjoining room I believe it is the first time she has been alone with Mr. Dyer, for she told me he even made his proposal of marriage in the presence of her mother."

"That's the terrible part," burst Ralph Sutton, his chest expanding as he spoke. "My wife not only listened to the insult, but accepted it, and left this class villain with Thora for nearly an hour. I happened to be out at the time. I told me the whole story this morning, and Thora had gone to your house. Poor woman she was quite unaware that the man was a Mormon, but I have made her see the horrible danger; she is now almost distracted with fears for her daughter."

"Mr. Dyer is my friend," replied Barcroft, "and a man of high intelligence. You misjudge him utterly. I have the greatest belief in his sense of honour and will write to Mrs. Sutton, and try to soothe her misgivings. You and Thora won't need me if the carriage drops me at my door; I shall drive you home. I have rather a headache."

Thora made no remark, but her face was unmoved: "Thank you." She had maintained a stony silence from the moment

led him away, glancing back at Ezra with a look more eloquent than words. Mrs. Barcroft understood all she would have liked to say, and how the words were burning like a volcano in her throat. She dared not trust herself to speak, while written plainly on the pale, emotional face, a story of great agony manifested itself in quivering muscles and ashen lips.

"Good-bye, dear child." Mrs. Barcroft bent to kiss her.

"Good-bye," whispered Thora, pressing her hand convulsively.

The carriage drove on as Mr. Sutton raised his hat.

Mrs. Barcroft wondered what would pass between them at her departure.

Thora turned to her father instantly, and questioned him in low, imperative tones.

"Tell me," she said, "did you make a scene before mother? Did you leave her in that frantic frame of mind which made you assault Mr. Dyer like a man in a common brawl? I am asking for a reason—because you know what the doctor said."

Mr. Sutton started. He had forgotten everything save his enmity towards the Elder from Salt Lake City.

Thora brought his mind sharply back to a trouble of longer standing, a danger nearer home.

"What did the doctor say?"

Thora guessed her father was pretend to forget, to cover his cruelty and fo She noticed he wiped some beads of perspiration from his forehead.

"That a great shock might affect mental balance. We were to guard against exciting her, and be especially careful when those severe headaches came on, from which she has suffered ever since she was thrown on her head in that carriage accident."

The words fell like weights of lead on Ralph Sutton's heart. A vision of himself raging up and down his wife's room, before his mind, like the recollection of a nightmare. Suspecting that Thora had attended meetings, over which a well known Mormon presided, he primed himself with authenticated stories of shameful practices familiar to the daily life in Utah. All that he had hurled unmercifully at the shadowing woman, whom he accused of helping their child to ruin.

"I may have spoken a little sharply," he confessed.

"You might have reserved your anger for Ezra and myself."

"I object to your calling that name Ezra."

Thora ignored the remark.

"When you left mother, was she much upset?"

"A little hysterical, perhaps, but I was so anxious to find you, I had no time

lose. I went straight to Mrs. Barcroft's house, and the servant there knew, from a message received on the telephone, that you had gone to visit Mr. Dyer. Naturally, I obtained the address and followed. What I found was surely enough to raise my ire—you and he closeted in a room alone together."

Thora put up a protesting hand. She was too weary to listen to moralising, too agitated, thinking of her mother, to argue further about Ezra. The most important question now was the subject of that frail woman's health.

"I told mother he came from Salt Lake," she said, "but it never seemed to strike her he was a Mormon. I wondered at the time she did not guess, especially as I assured her I should not marry him unless he changed certain views to which I strongly objected. His love for me almost tempts him to place himself under the ban, but how could I let him risk his life? It would be murder if I allowed any such sacrifice."

Mr. Sutton shuddered, he spoke with feeling, but less anger.

"Unless you wash your hands of the whole matter, you are a lost woman, Thora. You are playing with the fires of hell. You can't conceive what these people are, or you would understand my horror and my violence. These Mormons are a thorn in

the side of America. If you join them y will be an outlaw to the end of your li All their practices are against the Goverment, which they trick by keeping the wives in different houses. Dyer will nat rally promise to be different to the rest, b only a fool would believe him."

"Who gave you your information i Thora asked curiously.

"Never mind; I made it my business find out. I prepared for this day."

Mr. Sutton turned his head away sulki and lapsed into silence, for which Th was grateful. She heaved a sigh of rel when the carriage drew up at the barrack-li building of flats. She had often wondered some day it would be her good fortune live in a house. These little dwellings, stor upon storey, containing human destini appeared to her one of the modern ev for destroying individuality.

"We must not only form ourselv upon a general pattern," she would sa "but we must be built into the awful san ness too."

Now she ran breathlessly up the int minable stairs, for a lift was an unknow luxury in these "mansions."

Mr. Sutton followed more slowly, Th having asked for his key that she mig let herself in, and go straight to her mother

With a sense of misgiving she enter the narrow passage, and hastened to th

room Mrs. Sutton occupied. A turn of the handle showed her the door was locked.

"Mother, are you there?" she asked nervously. "It's only Thora, let me in."

A moaning sound reached her ears. In terror she beat her palms upon the panel.

"Before father comes," she whispered through the keyhole, "open the door, he will be here directly."

Scarcely had she finished the sentence, before a hand shot out through a small opening, drawing her into a darkened room. Then the door shut again with a bang, and the key turned sharply.

"Why have you barred the windows, and drawn the curtains, Mums dear?" asked Thora, in a voice strangely unlike her own, her heart beating furiously as she looked into the tear-stained face. She had never seen Mrs. Sutton with wild, dishevelled hair, but now she appeared like a ghost of her former self, and the very shape of her features seemed to have changed.

The answer came in a blood-curdling whisper—

"It was to keep the Mormons out, they were looking through the panes of glass, calling and beckoning. They wanted you; they kept saying, 'Give us Thora! Give us Thora!' Their faces were hideous. One voice keeps speaking still, surely you must hear and recognise it. That man who came last night, Ezra Dyer, he's been hiding in

different rooms ever since Ralph went away. I told him my husband would kill him, but he only laughed. It's awful to have him about the place. He has brought you a wreath of orange blossoms, and a long white veil. Hark, he is at the door now."

She cowered away, and hid her face in her hands.

"It's all right," said Thora soothingly. "I will send him a note, darling, to tell him to go, then he won't come back again. Father is outside, and he will see no one disturbs us."

She scribbled quickly on a sheet of paper—

"Fetch a doctor at once. Mother cover her head. Don't try to come in."

Ralph was turning the handle fruitlessly, and asking to be admitted.

Thora slipped the writing under the door.

"Look on the ground," she said.

Mr. Sutton snatched up the paper with trembling fingers, then he turned and ran down stairs again with the agility of a bird, forgetting, in his anxiety, the bulk of his nature destined he should carry.

"My doing! My doing!" he groaned. "Lord be merciful unto me, a sinner!"

CHAPTER IV

"SHE KNEW NOT WHAT SHE DID"

EZRA had left London, and was travelling back alone to Salt Lake City. No shade of bitterness mingled with his memory of England, only a great sadness, and the haunting recollection of a loved face. To his fellow passengers he was a mystery. They could not understand the handsome, retiring man, who sat apart in his deck chair, preferring solitude to the companionship of even the prettiest woman.

"He's like a magnificent gipsy, pining for his camp, and the wild life of an outlaw," said a dimpled girl who watched him from afar, "or a Napoleon in captivity. I suppose it's love that sets a shadow on his brow," laughing light heartedly. "I've seen him reading and re-reading a woman's letters."

"I'm afraid the poor fellow has been badly hit," replied the man at her side. (He was in favour of dimples and merriment.) "The gipsy's name is Dyer, and the other night the Captain drew him on to talk. By Jove! he can be eloquent when he pleases. It isn't for lack of ideas that he

hides in his shell, and builds up a wall of defence."

Ezra, unconscious of scrutiny, again contemplated the packet of letters which never left him. His last view of Thora was a painful one to remember. He conjured up the young figure, bent like a reed in a storm, as it guided away a man blinded by fury. Since that trying scene with Ralph Sutton in the London house he had found it impossible to gain another interview with Thora. Even Mrs. Barcroft, the faithful friend of lovers, assured him he must bid the girl a written good-bye.

"It will only be *au revoir*," he said. "As I live, I will see her again."

From Mrs. Barcroft he first heard of the tragedy which had befallen the Sutton family, just before starting on his journey.

"It's all too horribly pitiful," she told him. "The mother's brain suddenly gave way, something snapped, and the mind went past recalling. The doctors say there is no cure, and, mercifully perhaps, she can only live a few months. She suffers from most distressing illusions, and cries all day but is quite harmless, never attempts to hurt any one, or injure herself. Thora is always with her. At last, the girl has shown the full strength of her character. She will not hear of having a nurse, and not merely on account of their small means. If she goes away, the unhappy mother instantly thinks

she has gone to Salt Lake with you, and then her cries are heartrending. Mrs. Sutton has constant visions of men, whom she declares are Mormons, waiting to entrap her daughter."

The thought of the sad home, and the patient girl watching the mother she loved daily nearing the grave, in an existence worse than death, never left Ezra Dyer's mind.

"When Thora is free," he resolved, "I will make up to her for this dark time. Whatever it costs me, I shall hold her—body and soul. The flowers will blossom about her path, she will live to smile again."

But even as he made these mental promises, his shrewd intellect warned him that every inch of his daily path would in future be paved with danger. He was a prisoner in bonds of iron, a marked man chained to a faith that a woman's love had dimmed.

Oddly enough, he never tried to cast her out, or break the spell. Something of a fatalist, he accepted the slavery of love without a regret for its accompanying pain. A keen appreciation of the beautiful in life convinced him that the day would dawn when he and Thora should share together the rapture of living. The light and shade of changing nature never failed to chain his fancy in a poetic groove of lingering admiration. Colour and brightness, pictorial effect,

vivid sensations, gave him the rapture known only to the temperament which, for want of a better name, the world has dubbed "artistic."

He hated to feel, while he breathed salt spray, and gazed on the vast expanse of sky, that Thora must drag out a week waiting in a sick room. Would her husband survive the strain? This, and a thousand other questions connected with her welfare he asked his harassed mind hourly.

In far off London, Thora followed him in thought, with a watchfulness as true and tender as his own. The recollection of his face, his voice, his whole personality, sustained her like a tonic. In time she began to feel him at her side, almost to pray for him as a god.

"Ezra, help me!" she would say, when her mother's moaning rent her heart. "Save me from sharing her fate, tell me I am strong."

Then, vibrating across waves of far-off sound, the mellow tones of the public speaker came straight from distant space: "Thou art stronger than fate, surer than sorrow. We may be parted for a season, but be of good cheer, there is no obstacle in earth or heaven which my love cannot overcome."

It was on one of these days of vision when Ezra seemed especially near, that Thora's anxious watchfulness over her mother failed for the first time. They had

passed an unusually trying night, during which the girl could never close her eyes, since every moment the invalid sprang up, a sobbing victim to some fresh illusion.

In the morning, seeing Thora's haggard face, Mr. Sutton had, for the hundredth time, begged her to engage a professional attendant. The mere suggestion threw her into a fever of remonstrance.

"Mums wants me, and only me, all the time," she protested. "Anyone new makes her worse. When I give way, which is not likely, we can talk of a nurse. While I have a shred of strength, I shall never leave her."

Mr. Sutton's tear-dimmed eyes rested upon Thora wonderingly, his heart warmed with admiring approval.

"You're a good girl," he said. "There is more in you than I thought. I hope you know I'm grateful. If I could do anything to help, I would—but it's a woman's job isn't it?"

The words fell mechanically upon her ear.

"Yes, a woman's job," she repeated, hardly knowing what she said.

She walked slowly back to the room where her ailing mother sat, bent like some old peasant who has worked in the fields from youth. Mr. Sutton heard the door close, and, lighting his pipe, started on his daily journey to the city office in which he held the position of a superior clerk.

"Of course it was absurd to think I had not sufficient strength to act as day and night nurse, when love was at the helm," Thora told herself. "Love gave strength and one could 'will away' fatigue."

The tired aching behind her eyes surely had been caused by the brilliant sun as it streamed through the window, but she thought, drawing the blind in answer to the fretful gesture from Mrs. Sutton, and shut out those dazzling rays which seemed to mock the sadness of heart within.

The patient was evidently worn out from her night of unrest, for she remained huddled up in a big arm chair, and gave no answer when Thora spoke.

"I'll just sit quietly beside I resolved the girl, "and hold her hand in mine. I can't read, if I did, I really believe my eyes would drop out."

The resolve seemed a good one, and Thora's mind drifted to that ever alluring subject—the man she loved. A beautiful dream-cloud surrounded her, as gradually her head fell forward on her breast. Her fingers which held Mrs. Sutton's so firmly yet so kindly, relaxed. Human nature, now a hungry craving for long denied sleep, now master of the situation, wrapping the tired victim in a veil of forgetfulness.

Presently the sick woman stirred, and peered into the slumberer's face. Seeing Thora asleep she rose stealthily, and crept

on tiptoe to the door. Without a sound, Mrs. Sutton turned the handle, and stole out, a wasted figure in a grey gown, with a scarf of the same pale hue thrown about her head and shoulders.

Unobserved, she made her way to the staircase which led to the street below, and the freedom of the outer world.

* * * *

How long Thora lay dreaming she never really knew. When eventually she woke, it was with an awful sensation of fear and pained surprise. She realised at once she had failed at her post. The door, which at night she always fastened securely, was unlocked. Instantly she perceived the room was empty.

"Mums, dear," she called gently, running to the passage, "where are you?"

The flat appeared deserted as she passed from room to room. In the kitchen their one servant declared she had heard nothing.

Swiftly, the frightened daughter seized her hat, and ran down the winding stone stairs, her heart beating so fiercely she fancied she must fall. The blood, too, sang wildly in her head. She broke into a cold perspiration at the thought of her poor mother, alone in the London streets. She paused on the threshold of the mansions, uncertain which way to turn. The sight of a crossing sweeper at the corner gave her

hope. He would have been stationed there for some hours.

"Have you seen a lady in grey, thin, pale, and ill looking?" she asked eagerly, running up to him, just as he was starting on one of his wholly unnecessary pilgrimages across the road.

"A lady with a scarf across her face—a lady in great trouble?" he replied questioning.

"Yes, yes."

"She was here only a short time before she came out of them mansions yonder," jerked he his thumb in the direction of Thora's home. "She spoke to me that oddly, I felt a little nervous."

"What did she say?"

The girl's tone of genuine anxiety hurried a naturally slow speaker into the semblance of briskness and energy.

"Asked the way to the Roman Catholic Church. 'I'm not a Catholic,' she said, 'perhaps I'll find a priest in one of the confessionals. I want to tell him about my daughter's sins.' I guess she'd seen trouble so I told her to go to the red building's corner down on the left. She hurried off, I was running, you know,—made me think there was something really wrong, perhaps with her head."

"Thank you; thank you. I won't forget you when I return," answered Thora, not waiting to find her purse. She knew

the building well to which the man referred. Often she had slipped in for a few moments' silent prayer, regretting that such worship was not encouraged in the Church of England.

The Church of the Sacred Heart stood in a poor locality, its outer walls were begrimed with age, though inside an unexpected splendour met the eye. Rich friends in better neighbourhoods took care that the sacred edifice should uphold at least the outward beauty of a religion which appealed directly to the senses.

"Shall I find her here?" murmured Thora with inward misgiving.

A sickening dread of something, she knew not what, laid icy fingers on her heart. It needed a strong physical effort to force her hesitating steps across the threshold.

For a moment, as she entered, the darkness caused by stained glass windows made the contrast from sunlight confusing to even the best sight.

A few kneeling figures dotted here and there—a young woman standing by a confessional, rosary in hand, and a stout priest making his way to the little box along a side aisle from the vestry.

Suddenly, a startled movement brought the worshippers sharply to their feet, as a grey gowned figure sprang ghost-like from behind the pulpit, and ran with outstretched arms towards the high altar, crying in clear accents, which vibrated through the church:

"The Mormons! the Mormons! are even here! It is their tabernacle. woe! woe! woe!"

Before the thunderstruck listeners could fully realise what was occurring, the fra woman had made a desperate onslaught upon the Holiest of Holies.

With a yell, she flung the sacramental elements to the ground, the clatter of the falling chalice setting other women in the church shrieking hysterically. Thora and the priest rushed towards her, but the weak invalid turned in glaring fury on the one who would draw her back, holding as a weapon a great gold candlestick she had torn from its dignified resting place on the altar.

Madly she fought the now excited crowd—fought like the wildest woman of the slum or a fierce beast guarding her young, even now and again hissing out the one word "Mormon!" in a voice that had lost its human note, and sounded like a growl.

Then, escaping from her pursuers, with extraordinary cunning, she seemed to disappear between their feet, and tottering forward fell by the choir stalls, a prostrate ash-colored figure, with the stamp of death on her twisted features.

"Let me pass," cried Thora, trying to push her way through the people. "I am her daughter. I must go to her. Let me pass."

The priest knelt down by the dying woman, raising a crucifix before her glazing eyes.

"She knew not what she did," he whispered to the sobbing girl, as he made the sign of the cross.

Thora knelt beside him, a deadly faintness numbing her mental agony, and blotting out the shame, the horror, the tragedy of the moment. Kindly hands caught her quivering frame, and in merciful unconsciousness they bore the girl away. Some thought she, too, had passed into the land of shadows, and the fearful majesty of death held the watchers silent. Without a word they went their separate ways, chilled by the unexpected drama of human suffering which the Church of the Sacred Heart had staged before their eyes.



CHAPTER V

AFTER THE TRAGEDY

THORA knew little of the days that followed. She was not present at the quiet laying to rest of the mother she loved, for reaction from a long strain had brought all the quivering strings of nature into tangled rebellion. The doctors called it a nervous breakdown following upon shock, to Thora it was just a drifting away from the things of life. Her powers of thought were dulled, she felt even too weary to grieve. The bed on which she lay seemed made of some shadowy fabric through which she felt herself sinking—she knew not whither, and cared less. Her voice became a whisper at its loudest, and the days were marked by the smallest episodes, a twinkling of sunbeams upon the wallpaper, or the splashing of rain against her window pane. The nights were usually dreamless, her brain had lost its swing of imagination.

The hospital nurse, whom at last Mr. Sutton was obliged to engage, advised him to keep away from Thora. She guessed his voice and manner were calculated to agitate the exhausted girl. His lamentations, and the open way in which he discussed the late Mrs. Sutton's death, already gav

the impression that the wound would heal rapidly. He spoke freely of his loss, as a man calculating in his mind the possibility of eventually filling the gap with a more suitable companion.

"Poor soul," he would mutter, to the trumpeting of a nose in sympathy with tearful eyes. "She's best in the grave as things turned out. It's hard to replace a good wife, but a man can't spend the rest of his days in sorrow and solitude. Best look ahead, and hope for the light sometime."

When Thora was allowed to see an outside face, Mrs. Barcroft came to her. She slipped noiselessly into the room, her hands full of pink roses, and her lips forcing a smile, to counteract the choking sensation in her throat.

Thora tried to sit up, but fell back on the pillows, silently returning Muriel's kiss.

"You mustn't talk, dear," she whispered, "but I've come to tell you that I have persuaded the doctor and your father to let me take you away into the country. It can't be good for you here in stuffy London. You want the bracing breezes of the hills, with the sea dancing in the distance. You need nice open air influences to coax you back to strength—long views of stretching green, trees with no smuts on their leaves, the clean wholesome atmosphere of Grey-stone."

A faint colour crept to Thora's cheeks.

She felt the truth of the words, and pressed her friend's hand gratefully. She was surprised her father had consented, not realising, in her weakness, how difficult he found it to provide the much needed change of scene.

"Still good to me," whispered the girl, "in spite of everything."

"Nothing can come between us, my child," whispered Mrs. Barcroft, with a thrill of that maternal feeling she was ever giving out to humanity at large. "I know all you have suffered, and because I may help you to forget a little, your father is prepared to forgive my folly in the past. He knows how deeply I regret the consequences of that day."

"We won't talk about mother now," whispered Thora; "later on—at—Grey-stone."

"Yes, dear."

"Have you heard from Ezra?"

"No."

"Did you tell him what had happened?"

Mrs. Barcroft shook her head.

"I dared not."

"But why?"

"Oh, never mind. I will explain when you are stronger."

"You believed the news might bring him back. I have thought so, too. I say to myself, he knows why I held out, he will realise now that it is all different."

"Don't—Thora—don't."

Fear expanded Mrs. Barcroft's eyes, her lips trembled, she clasped her hands as if in supplication.

A mystic expression made Thora's face placid yet puzzling. She spoke in a low dreamy voice, her whole attitude appeared inspired, as she lay with her head thrown back, and her arms stretched out upon her pillows.

"When you are weak, you see and know. It's quite easy for me now to be in touch with Ezra. The great matters look small, nothing frightens me. When people are strong and well, they grow calculating. Now I care so little for my life, I don't mind what happens, if only I can be with him."

Mrs. Barcroft weighed the words as the sayings of one who had just recovered from the delirium of brain fever. She was not prepared to take any of Thora's remarks seriously.

Her silence soothed the girl. She watched the tender hands arranging the bunch of pink roses on the coverlet, with a sense of satisfaction at their beauty and fragrance.

"How did you know I wanted them to lie there, out of water, for a little time?" asked Thora.

"I read the desire in your eyes. I felt you liked to touch them."

"That is sympathy," murmured the

girl. "I fancy we must both be in a receptive state. Tell me about our country vis-à-vis that I may picture it to-night. I am away a great deal, and of course I think all the time. If my brain could rest, I might soon get well."

Mrs. Barcroft fell in with the request, making her voice as low and soothing as possible.

"The village is Greystone, and the place has been quaintly named Dream Hall. Before my husband went to Canada on business, we were motoring in the wilds on a lovely spring day, and caught a glimpse of it from the road. He stopped to make inquiries. We found the old house was sometimes let in the summer. 'The village place for you after the season,' he said, 'when I shall be on my way home.' It certainly seemed an ideal spot for a reunion. So he took Dream Hall for August and September. I shall be alone there at first. Phil cannot return for some weeks yet, but you will be a perfect blessing to the grateful widow."

Thora realised fully that, out of the kindness of her heart, this pleasure-loving woman was giving up the delights of entertaining a house party, to mother one who was ill and bereaved. She tried to express her gratitude, but the words were stopped by kisses.

"You have talked quite enough, and now I am going to run away," said Mrs. Barcroft.

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And true to her word, she rose without waiting for the patient to reply.

Waving her hand, she flitted through the open door, leaving Thora alone with the scattered pink roses, and thoughts of Grey-stone.

On the cold, uncarpeted stairs of the mansions, the visitor met Mr. Sutton.

"Poor little Thora looks dreadfully fragile," she said, "but I shall hope to nurse her back to health among the hills. It's very quiet and bracing where we are going."

He thanked Mrs. Barcroft warmly, as he accompanied her to her carriage.

"It's no surprise to me that she broke down after the terrible shock," he declared. "She nursed her mother with unfailing zeal. From the very first, her courage and patience surprised me."

"Did it?" queried Thora's friend. "I must say that her conduct throughout was exactly what I should have expected. She has a peculiarly strong and reliable character, though the final tragedy was enough to wrench nerves of iron."

"Indeed, yes," murmured the man in a husky voice. "I hear the priest who was in the church at the time was quite ill afterwards. The sympathy we received on all sides has proved most touching."

As he held out his hand in farewell, his eyes caught those of a girl on the pavement opposite. She bowed somewhat stiffly,

and watched Mrs. Barcroft drive away. a moment Mr. Sutton crossed the road, a greeted the young woman, who stood s studying the vanishing victoria.

"Who's that?" she asked, a tr sharply; then, regaining her presence mind, she raised her eyes slowly to his fa with a languishing look, attained throt study before her mirror.

"My daughter's friend. She called inquire, and the nurse allowed her to the patient for a few minutes."

Addie Meal, who had known Thora school, and cordially disliked her, answe in a voice which barely concealed a note sarcasm :—

"She can't be so very bad if she able to see people. How does she get won like that to take her up? I guess t make her both proud and dissatisfied."

Mr. Sutton felt the truth of the wo

"I am afraid you are right," he s
"Thora has quite sailed away from me.

Once more the practised eyes w upraised, as Addie Meal sighed sym thetically.

"Poor Mr. Sutton. It just breaks heart to think what you have had to b If I were your daughter, I would ne leave you for those frivolous dressed Society folk. But then I am so differ from Thora. I believe in a quiet home l and as to nerves, well, I call them rubb just an excuse to lie in bed."

The man listened with a glow of approval visible on his round, red face. He was casting a look of approbation over Addie's trim figure. The girl held herself peculiarly erect, with an aggressive uprightness, in which grace was eliminated by taut muscles, so stiffly set it was impossible to picture them in abandoned repose. Her hair also maintained the same character, netted neatly, and framing the head with monotonous regularity. No one had ever seen Addie's fringe ruffled by the highest wind. She was conscious of the fact, and calmly disregarded all the emotions of the elements.

"Mother and I would be very pleased to see you to tea again this afternoon," she continued. "We feel sure you must be lonely, with your daughter laid up, and no one to look after you. We should like you to consider our house a second home, especially when Thora is away in the country. I can't think how she can go, and leave you desolate."

The words gave Mr. Sutton a sense of his personal injury, though, in justice to Thora, he explained that the illness had been brought on through her unfailing goodness to her mother.

"Ah!" murmured Miss Meal significantly, "we always said she gave her affection entirely in that quarter. But, of course, she is not quite like other girls. At school, you know, she wouldn't have any-

thing to do with us. She had ideas, and liked to be on a pedestal. Our society was not brilliant enough for her. We were just ordinary, simple young people, and she could not stand our conversation. The moment lessons were over, she bolted home to her mother. We used to look on her as a mystery, and someone started the idea that she had the evil eye. After that, we were rather frightened, and glad when she kept away."

"The evil eye," muttered Mr. Sutton thoughtfully. He was walking now beside Addie in the direction of her home. "Do you believe in such things?"

"I can't help fancying certain people bring bad luck and sorrow to a house. A person might be a Jonah, and spoil everything. I have heard of such cases. I had a cousin on the stage, and she told me in the profession there is a superstition like that."

Mr. Sutton was thinking back over the dark days of the past. Through Thora all the trouble came. But for her, he would never have driven his poor wife to madness. He shrugged his shoulders uneasily, and changed the subject.

"It doesn't do for sunny natures like yours to dwell on such subjects. Dear me the man will be fortunate who wins such a girl as you to brighten his home. I must say I admire an orderly mind, it's a treat to go to your house, and see the way th'

are kept. Your mother is a woman in a thousand."

They had reached the small villa where the widowed Mrs. Meal lived with her only daughter. She had seen them from the window, and came out to wish Mr. Sutton good morning.

"I am loafing about to-day," he said. "Got a holiday at the office. My chief is marrying for the second time. He believes in widowers consoling themselves."

Did he steal a glance at Addie as he spoke? The girl could not be sure, for her eyes were lowered.

Mrs. Meal, a prosaic woman in every sense of the word, appeared an older duplicate of her daughter. She had the same stiff figure and tightly bound hair, though she lacked Addie's pink colouring, and languishing eyes.

"Small blame to him," declared the widow, who had never received an offer of marriage since the late Mr. Meal's decease. "Widowers make good husbands. They understand women, and I always tell Addie this. My advice to her is, marry a man of sensible age, accustomed to a settled home life. What's the good of falling in love with a boy? Take someone on whom you can lean."

"Very sound sentiments," replied Mr. Sutton. "I am going to trouble you, if I may, with my presence again this afternoon. Miss Addie has asked me to tea."

"Delighted, I'm sure. I would press you to have a bit of lunch with us, but our servant has the faceache, and we've only a scrap of something cold in the larder."

Mr. Sutton took his leave, with a friendly *au revoir*, which he brought out in a heavy British accent.

As he vanished down the dreary West Kensington road, Addie gave a little chuckle of stifled excitement.

"It's going splendidly," she whispered. "He is head over ears in love with me already, but dare not say so. Naturally, he must wait awhile, for decency, but it's my belief he and his wife were never in sympathy with each other. Won't Thora be sick? Oh! she's impossible, mother; has carriage folk to call on her, and won't have anything to do with her neighbours. While she is away in the country we shall get our chance. Mr. Sutton has quite a respectable income, enough to live on quietly, and I like him."

"You might do a great deal worse, Addie. He is a steady business man, if ever I saw one, not likely to lose his berth."

"Men are scarce enough," declared Addie, whose only admirers in the past consisted of impecunious youths, without sufficient means to support themselves in comfort. "If Mr. Sutton asks me, I shall be very pleased to become the stuck-up Thora's step-mother. We will see who is on the top rail then!"

CHAPTER VI

THE SPIRITUAL WIFE DOCTRINE

THORA began a letter to her father from the quaint old house at Greystone. Seated by an open window, round which a grape vine made a halo of greenery, her pen flew across the page.

"This place," she wrote, "is a veritable 'Dream Hall' to me. Every nook and corner has its individuality. There is a broad, somewhat formal terrace, with steps leading to the garden where borders of flowers wave in the hill breezes. One can picture brocaded figures tripping beneath the yew trees which are marshalled in soldier-like lines, keeping sentry over a long lawn, absolutely in keeping with the dignity of the old house——"

She broke off suddenly, her pen fell from her fingers, and rolled over the paper, leaving a trail of ink. Just for a moment she had forgotten, and it seemed as if she were writing to her mother. She realised, with a sharp pang, that her description of these surroundings would in no way interest Mr. Sutton. He was not a lover of the picturesque, and cared little for scenery. Often Thora had heard her mother say that he went about the world blind. Fine feelings,

which appreciate Nature, were so conspicuously absent, that the mere idea of describing such a place as Dream Hall to him appeared ridiculous. At such a moment as this, Thora suffered to the full the awful loss of the mother who had died, practically on the day Ezra said farewell.

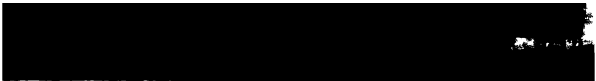
The girl rose to her feet, battling to keep back the tears which burned in her eyes. Dark shadows seemed closing around her, though she stood in a long shaft of sunlight. She felt as if she would suffocate in the room. Snatching up her hat, she hurried downstairs, eager to escape the sight of that half-finished letter which had tortured an open wound.

Muriel Barcroft met her on the terrace. She had two or three books in her hands, which she held out to Thora.

"I've finished Ezra's literature," she said. "The Mormons' faith sounds right enough, if you only read so far. They follow the admonition of Paul: 'Believe all things,' 'Hope all things,' and strive to be able to 'endure all things.' They profess to believe in the Trinity."

Muriel pointed as she spoke to an open page, which gave a summary of Ezra Dyer's creed. In a moment Thora's face brightened. She was transformed from a broken hearted woman to a girl full of life and interest.

She took up the volume carefully, and read from the passage indicated.



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"We believe that through the atonement of Christ all mankind may be saved by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel. We believe that these ordinances are: 1st, Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. 2nd, Repentance. 3rd, Baptism by immersion for the remission of sins. 4th, Laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Spirit. 5th, The Lord's Supper.

"We believe in the powers and gifts of the everlasting Gospel, viz., the gift of faith, discerning of spirits, prophecy, revelation, visions, healing, tongues, and the interpretation of tongues.

"We believe in the Word of God recorded in the Bible; we also believe the Word of God recorded in the Book of Mormon, and in all other good books.

"We believe in the literal resurrection of the body, and that the dead in Christ will rise first, and that the rest of the dead live not again until the thousand years are expired.

"We claim the privilege of worshipping Almighty God according to the dictates of our conscience, unmolested.

"We believe in being honest, true, chaste, temperate, benevolent, virtuous, and upright, and in doing good to all men. Everything virtuous, lovely, praiseworthy, and of good report we seek after, looking forward to the 'recompense of reward.'"

A note of triumph rang in Thora's



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voice; she appeared to expand under the influence of hope, as the sun opens a flower in early spring, to be bitten by the frosts of fast approaching night.

"What could be better or purer?" she asked.

Mrs. Barcroft cast doubtful eyes upon the innocent looking volume. Her voice, as she replied, banished Thora's smile.

"It is the book Ezra sent, remember. He will only show you the best side. I have heard that in the name of religion, which rules and governs their whole lives, these Mormons commit the most diabolical deeds that the mind of man can conceive. I want you to know the worst, as well as the best, before you write again to Ezra. Not all their ideas are so plain sailing and straightforward as those you have just read. Take their notion of God, for instance. He is described as 'a Being who hath both body and parts, and also passions, with a material, organised intelligence.' They will tell you He cannot occupy two distinct places at once, therefore He cannot be everywhere. He eats, He drinks, He loves, He hates. This you will find in 'The Latter Day Saint Catechism.' I notice Ezra is careful to say nothing which relates to the Spiritual World, or Mormon Materialism. I have been seeking information from another source that you may not be blindly led away."

The light faded from Thora's face.



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more the old thrill of fear quickened her heart.

"Supposing," Muriel continued, "that after you had adopted this faith, and married Ezra, he had a revelation from God that it was lawful and right for him to take to himself another wife. He would tell you that as it was in the days of Abraham, so it shall be in these last days. The Elders revel in certain hidden orgies which are quite unmentionable. Do you imagine Ezra, as an Elder, has not been initiated into these mysteries? He will know just how to lay before you the Spiritual Wife doctrine."

"What is that?" asked Thora.

She sank on to a low stone seat over which the grey lichen crept. The view of the distant hills, and the thread of blue sea which met the clouds, looked hazy to her now. She listened half dazed, as if waiting for a death sentence.

"Perhaps I ought not to discuss these matters with you while you are still so weak," said Mrs. Barcroft, seeing the strained expression. "Shall we put all the books away, and leave Mormonism alone for a fortnight?"

"Oh! no, no," pleaded Thora, eagerly. "Don't you see, I can only talk of it to you? At home my lips are sealed. What good can it do to shut up a subject in your heart, and let it fester there? In time all the secrecy and reserve becomes unbearable."

Before you took me away from London, I felt imprisoned within myself. I even hid the books Ezra sent me from my hospital nurse, for fear she should suspect something. My father thinks I have broken off all communication. He does not realise that I could not possibly resist reading the letters and pamphlets from Salt Lake."

"Perhaps it is better to let you talk, if it relieves your mind. You must be your own doctor here. I have only sunshine and flowers to prescribe, and the tonic of a motor car. I am going to motor you back to health, for swift movement has a miraculous charm for tired brains, and overwrought nerves. The violent cure of rushing through the air at fifty miles an hour is a sure remedy for the ills of the flesh."

"You have drifted from the subject," said Thora intently. "Tell me about the spiritual wives; they rise like horrid ghosts to blot out the beauty of Dream Hall, and the joys of the car."

Mrs. Barcroft turned her head away as she replied, anxious to avoid the girl's wide, pitiful eyes, fixed upon her with a look of wounded wonder.

"The secret of the Spiritual Wife doctrine is this: Their kingdom is to consist in their own posterity, and the more wives, the more opportunity of getting a large kingdom. So it is a distinct object to one who holds this doctrine sacred, as thousands do, to



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get all the women he can. Consequently, it subjects those of the female sex over whom he has influence to literal ruin. The spiritual marriage is, in itself, no different to any other, but the Mormons teach that this system is what must be understood by the blessings of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. There is also an institution of 'Cloistered Saints,' forming the highest order of the Mormon harem, composed of women, whether unmarried or married, as secret spiritual wives. Ezra represented the leaders of the Mormons to you as gods, but I have reason to believe they have among them some of the wickedest men on the face of the earth. Knowing all this, would you dare to throw in your lot with such a people? If your husband, an Elder of such a Church, wished to take other wives to himself, what could you do?"

"There would always be suicide," said Thora. "I sometimes feel I love Ezra so much that I would sacrifice all my future for a few happy months with him. You forget I believe in his honour. I am sure he would not break his word."

"You judge him by the standard of an Englishman in love. You cannot realise the absolute difference made by environment, and a deep seated religion. Had he no wives when he left Utah, and came to preach to the English people, in the hope of gathering sheep to the fold?"

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"I can't say. I had no wish to ask him. He offered me his future, I could not also demand his past."

"You fancied your reticence arose from fine feeling, when really it was the outcome of fear. You dreaded what he might tell you."

The truth of the words drove home. Mrs. Barcroft continued unmercifully:

"The worst of it is they use religion to cover sin, making their own laws, and persuading their victims to believe that a system of polygamy is still a direct revelation from God, and therefore absolutely justifiable. This hideous doctrine was started by Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet, and founder of the sect, in order that he might indulge his passions under a cloak of saintliness. Their blasphemy is too revolting to repeat, for they try to fit their own crimes to the most sacred Figure in our religion. Doesn't it make you, as a British woman, brought up in Christian England, shudder with disgust? Can you bring yourself to dabble in the devil's work, and accept a creed in which this principle of so-called plural marriage is described as 'the religion of living near the Lord?'"

Mrs. Barcroft felt she was being too kind. Before this visit, she had prided herself with knowledge to save Thora from entering a community of licentious fanatical people. Since Mrs. Sutton's she knew the girl would be sorely



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to join Ezra, and throw in her lot with the unknown. Adventure, uncertainty, and change would naturally appeal to her roving temperament. Home held no attractions, therefore she was a prey to imagination and romance.

"When you tell me these things I can hardly breathe," said Thora, putting her hand to her throat. "It seems to grip me here. But unless I accept Ezra's religion there seems no way of our coming together. His life would be in danger were he to give up the faith. Mormons preach 'blood atonement,' and 'Church-inspired murders.' The doctrine that an offending member may be put out of the way is given from the Tabernacle pulpit. If they are 'covenant breakers' it is considered right and just to shed their blood. The priests would call it the unsheathing of the Almighty's sword, and this is taught by leading Elders. The late Brigham Young would have told you that he and the Apostle Saint Paul were in agreement concerning the 'sins of death.' He had always some Bible text at hand to suit his purpose. If Ezra were put 'under the ban' he would be certainly killed. When murder is a part of religion there is no reprieve. He realises he could not possibly escape the Mormon law."

Muriel listened attentively, surprised Thora knew so much.

"Dear child," she said, "you are right.

Despite all the past history of bloodshed and horror which built up this extraordinary body, the Mormon priesthood has never been more autocratic than to-day. Taking this into account, is it not worth any sacrifice to put the whole matter behind you, and start afresh, wiping Ezra Dyer out of your life ? ”

Thora sprang to her feet ; her old excitable manner, which had remained in abeyance during her illness, returned. Once more her eyes flashed, and the colour glowed in her cheeks. Dream Hall had a purity, a wonder, in its character and atmosphere which affected her curiously. It blotted out her past with subtle magic, drawing her mind into fresh avenues of thought.

“ Can these books be made into a parcel ? ” she said breathlessly.

“ Certainly. For post, or cremation ? ” asked Muriel.

“ I want to send them back to Salt Lake. I shall write to Ezra to-day. I must tell him I cannot accept his faith, and that I dare not risk his return. He will see then how impossible it all is, he will perhaps feel rather relieved. I should like to know he had forgotten. I think it shows how much I love him, that I would gladly suffer alone.”

“ Poor little girl,” murmured Muriel, softly, then added, with a sigh of relief :—

“ I will send for the paper and string.”



CHAPTER VII

DREAM HALL INFLUENCE

THORA dismissed the subject of Ezra—not from her thoughts, but from her speech. She hardly mentioned his name now to Muriel Barcroft, but still steeped her mind in Mormon literature, which threw a lurid light upon her lover's religion. Her hostess left printed attacks on the Latter Day Saints lying about where Thora must see them. The girl took them to her room, to study in private.

Every night she closed her eyes with the prayer—

“Oh, God! save me from Mormonism.”

Horrible doctrines, broadly stated, filled her with terror, the enormities of their system, the impostures, and crimes, haunted her.

She had read of a man who lectured in years past to prove that Mormonism was a system of error, and the Book of Mormon a lying, filthy, foolish romance. He spoke with impassioned bursts of eloquence, he laid the sect bare to an astonished British public.

She hated the thought that her lover belonged to such a community, and would



gladly have welcomed the day (but for the risk to his life) when Ezra, called by her love, and guided by her influence, might return to England, and denounce the faith he had previously upheld. The words of the dead lecturer often rang in her ears as she fell asleep, with the little old volume of his arguments under her pillow.

"Never in my life," he had said, "did I read a more dangerous, soul-damning romance than the Book of Mormon, a lying piece of nonsense, proved to be utterly incorrect in its chronology, and full of contradictions. Its only proper name is 'Mormon,' for the word signifies—'Hobgoblin'; frightful spectres, deathly, ghastly, rawheads, and bloody bones!'"

As the summer days passed by, the long hours spent in motoring brought refreshment and physical health to Thora. She had youth on her side, and natural energy. Gradually she began to realise there must be something more in life than the love she had given Ezra. Higher aims than the gratification of passion unfolded themselves, and set her busily analysing the difficult problem of existence. Muriel's careful companionship helped to blot out misery of the past, her good advice, tacitly given, took effect. Their long talks in the motor were not thrown away, as Thora exerted herself to interest and enliven the girl.

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"You must be very glad your husband is coming home so soon," Thora said suddenly one day, after a long silence in the car, during which their eyes scanned the landscape, with its ever changing beauty.

"Glad? Why yes. My heart is almost bursting with joy. It's been a long separation, but I never allowed myself to indulge depression, for I know it is a vice which grows, and woman-like, I want to avoid wrinkles. But, of course, I have missed Phil terribly."

"I shall love to see your meeting, but once you are together, I shall give you my blessing, and retire from making a third on the honeymoon," said Thora decidedly. "Besides, my father may want me. I should not have left him now, except for my health. I don't believe I could ever have recovered in London. I was terribly depressed and weak."

"You look so much better, Mr. Sutton will hardly know you. I have been thinking, Thora, you might really try and adapt your home to your personal taste. After all, every woman's home is her kingdom, and by just managing your father a little, you might have everything your own way. Get some of the books you like best round you, they are always companions, and cultivate a few friends. Personally, I know I should make myself happy anywhere. Put me down in a small out-of-the-way flat, and in a short

time I would grow attached to it. You have plenty of imagination, which is half the battle. If you adapt yourself to surroundings, and cultivate a sense of humour, you can build up a little world of your own."

Thora was in a very pliable mood, and the words gave her courage. She listened, with her soul shining through her eyes.

"I'll think over your idea to-night, when I'm quite alone," she whispered. "I have some terrible prejudices to conquer, but it's worth a battle, isn't it—to—to find your best self, and lay the enemy low? I could be quite happy there if it were not for father, but I must try and be a better daughter. That's my difficulty. It may be easier now. I was always suffering for mother, sharing the little daily pin-pricks of her mistake. The humiliating jars of small friction, differences of taste and opinion, may mar one's life almost as much as big troubles. I can always say to myself: 'Mother is spared this,' which will make everything easier to bear. I might even find in my father some hidden treasures of thought or feeling which she missed."

The idea held charm, and fascinated the girl's mind. She thought of herself as an explorer, about to start on a journey of discovery into a bleak land which might hold nothing but pain, or give up a store of unexpected treasure. Resolutely she determined to try, with all the powers of

her nature, to understand Ralph Sutton better. Possibly he felt the antagonism which had developed yearly in her mind, as she saw how completely he misunderstood her mother. It was surely a sign of weakness on her part—that growing estrangement between father and daughter. The whole situation was unnatural. Her instinct told her there should be some “call of the blood,” some note of sympathy passing from parent to child. If the older mind lost sight of this, it was the duty of the younger to seek and find. She would go back as a digger in search for gold.

She confided her ideas on the subject to Mrs. Barcroft, and her cheeks glowed as she spoke.

“Muriel,” she said, “I have had a revelation, it came to me with your words of advice, and returning strength. I see myself as a conspicuous failure, and I don’t like the picture. I am going home to ‘do my duty in that state of life,’ etc. The common little sacrifices which lay our big ambitions low, are after all worth the making, just because they look so unimportant. There can be nothing noble in working for a reward. I mean to try and make father love me. I have a gap to fill in a very commonplace nest. It is useless for a sparrow to strive to be a bird of Paradise.”

The girl’s voice held a deep note of real intention. Her words were the outcome of

long thought. Mrs. Barcroft welcomed them with a sense of relief.

"I really do think," she replied, "the air of Greystone has done you good. Your mind is braced up as well as your body. It is easier to see clearly in a pure fresh atmosphere the way of life, and the best course to follow. You have realised that even in Dream Hall we cannot be dreamers for ever."

Thora bowed her head.

"These peaceful days have been heaven on earth for me. I have had my struggles, and stumbled against sharp corners. I wanted to live down the past, and rise above the ruins. To-morrow your husband will return; the day after, you and I must say good-bye. I am so glad for your sake he is coming back, yet from a selfish standpoint I cannot be sorry that fate separated you for a season. I've had my innings, and you've given me the best of yourself, the truest sympathy. Without your love, I really think I could never have survived mother."

Mrs. Barcroft suddenly felt happy about Thora. Her bereavement had worked for good. Through sorrow, the girl saw at last the plain sensible path which the accident of birth selected for her. She was going to make the best of it, to face the daily commonplace life with her father in a spirit meekness and charity.

"The effort will be worth making,"



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older woman assured her. "I always think if a person has sufficient brain power and resolve, they can rise above circumstances, and be happy in an environment utterly unsuited to their temperament. I shall watch your progress with eager interest. You must confide in me, and perhaps I shall be able to help you."

Thora smiled bravely. She had seldom felt more determined. Henceforth she would take, without grumbling, the crumbs which life offered, and never remember her heart was hungry, until starvation drove her to despair. At present she felt strong enough to ward off temptation, and even experienced a certain excitement at the thought of trying to win her father's love.

CHAPTER VIII

THE DAUGHTER AND THE GUEST

MR. BARCROFT had returned, and Thora watched the meeting between husband and wife with a sensation of hungry longing for the man she was trying to forget. Then came the good-bye to Dream Hall. All her favourite nooks and corners were visited for the last time. The place seemed strangely sacred, she gazed on the old house with reverence and gratitude.

As the train bore her away from Grey-stone, Mr. and Mrs. Barcroft sighed involuntarily, watching the fluttering handkerchief she waved in farewell.

"Poor little motherless soul," said Muriel. "How I pity her! She is so young and rudderless. She needs a strong hand at the helm to guide her, but instead, she must float her barque alone. She is trying to sail to a safe shore, yet I almost fear I shall see her on the rocks."

"It is not often you meet such a tragic or passionate face on a young girl," replied Phil. "Do you really think she will settle down and live a humdrum life with Mr. Sutton?"

"No. I try to hope she may, but belief in her powers of endurance is rather shaky. I fear she will grow so deadly!"

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with him, that one day she'll simply pack up, and walk out of the house. Then she will go to—to—"

Muriel hesitated.

"To the devil," added Phil, finishing the sentence.

"I was going to say to Salt Lake City," murmured Muriel, "but perhaps it's the same thing. If only she were not quite so attractive I should feel far easier about her future. She has such a confidential way of trusting blindly in the goodness of anyone who happens to appeal to her rather unusual temperament. If Ezra Dyer were to return she would forget all my warnings. He has an irresistible personality, and Thora is like wax in his hands."

"A preacher of Mormonism," said Mr. Barcroft, "ought not to be allowed in the country. A Society of Morals should be formed to keep such people under lock and key. The late Brigham Young, when he sent out disciples to find sheep for the fold, always stipulated that he should have first selection of the converts. So some ribald tongue christened him 'Bring 'em Young.'"

Muriel felt too sad to laugh at the words.

"I must try to look after Thora when I get back to town. It is on my conscience always that I introduced her to Ezra. That is the worst of having girl friends, you never know when you are going to ruin their lives through a casual introduction."

Thora, travelling Londonwards, felt very sure of herself, as she contemplated her re-union with her father.

"It will just be tea time when I arrive," she thought, "and he will have returned from the office. I will try and cheer him up; it's dull for a man alone. He will enjoy talking, and hearing my news. The flowers Muriel gave me will make the flat look quite gay. I must arrange them at once on the tea table, and unpack the big home-made cake she smuggled into my box. Father and I will have quite a feast, he has rather a weakness for cake."

She felt like an actress playing a part, for deep down in her heart the real self in her hovered near a grave she had never seen. Home had lost the mother she loved, and remembered, as of old, when she eagerly waited for the coming of Thora, that she might hang upon her words, and drink in the gladness of youth.

London looked deserted. The houses wore an empty air, and blinds were drawn, as if upon the route of an expected funeral. The season had died with the coming of August and September.

"All the more reason I should be her as a companion for father, now the place looks so unattractive," said Thora to herself. "He will be surprised at the change in me, and I shall certainly never let me abuse motor cars again. They may

life as well as destroy—the dear, rejuvenating, sleep-giving things!”

She smiled as she recalled exhilarating journeys through the green and gold country, here a village, there a village — flashing past—children scurrying away to the gutters, birds taking flight, dogs idly barking, while she and Muriel were whirled—on—on—to the summit of hills, and the heart of vales. What matter to the hooded figures in the car that men and women stood blinded with dust, or splashed in mud? The motor was conquering space, and its magic of might paralysed pity, working a great selfishness in the heart of its devotees.

West Kensington! Ugh! How flat and dismal the place appeared. Sordid, too, with the dirt of London. Uncleaned windows, and soiled door steps, seemed to meet her eye at every turn. After the soft colours and sweet scents of Greystone, this city of souls sandwiched together played a poor part in the study of comparison.

Thank goodness the steps of the mansion which Thora inhabited had seen soap and water that very morning. She felt grateful for this small mercy, as she wended her way up innumerable flights of uncarpeted stone stairs. At last the door was reached. She felt ready to give her father quite a demonstrative embrace, since she recalled a hint from Muriel that perhaps she had been rather cold to Mr. Sutton in the past. She

thought he would answer the bell himself, knowing she was due at this hour, but, instead, the small thin-faced maid appeared on the threshold. After Dream Hall, the narrow passage of the flat looked almost suffocatingly minute as Thora entered.

"Is Mr. Sutton in?" she asked, after a brief inquiry if all were well.

"Yes, miss. He's having his tea."

"Oh, I wish he had waited," remembering the cake in her box. Thora felt conscious of actually preparing her smile, and her voice took a cheerful tone, as she entered the dining-room.

"Father," she cried, "here I am."

Mr. Sutton rose from a chair with evident embarrassment. He had been seated near—very near a visitor, who looked up with an air of affectation and unconcern.

"I asked Miss Meal to tea to meet you," explained the man, hurriedly. "She and her mother have been most kind to me during your absence, in fact, I hardly know how to thank them for all their attentions and lavish hospitality."

Addie stretched out a limp hand, and simpered as she replied:—

"It was a pleasure to do anything for your father, seeing he was left quite alone."

The presence of this young woman whom Thora and her mother would never have tolerated in the house, came like blow in the face. For a moment Ralph

daughter could hardly collect her thoughts sufficiently to reply to Ralph's guest.

Addie flashed a look of triumph at the black gowned figure during the pause.

"Very good of you, I'm sure," stammered Thora, surprised to find how the presence of so insignificant a person had damped her home coming. "May I have some tea?"

She could not suppress the note of sarcasm in her voice, seeing that Addie was in possession of the tea-pot, and did not offer to move. She had the air of one who feels completely at home.

"Mr. Sutton asked me to pour out," she said, "as I was here first. Of course, mother would not have allowed me to come alone, unless you had been expected. I thought your train got in earlier."

Thora watched the somewhat coarsely formed hand raise the tea-pot, which had been a wedding present to Mrs. Sutton. The widower seemed to have forgotten his daughter, and re-seating himself near Addie Meal, gazed at her with infatuated eyes.

A feeling of nausea crept over Thora. The position had revealed itself to her without a hint of warning.

"Had a nice visit?" asked Addie, throwing a crumb of conversation towards the new-comer, while her languishing eyes gazed in the direction of her host.

"Yes, thank you."

Thora turned her head away that she might not see.

Such deep indignation burned within her, she almost felt as if she were watching the defiling of her mother's body by some robber after death.

One word swam before her eyes, written in letters of blood: "Forgotten."

"I expect you are tired after your journey," continued Addie's drawling voice. "Don't stay for me if you want to unpack, no need for ceremony—with old school friends."

The words jarred. Addie had never been her friend. Evidently the girl was anxious to get her out of the room, to continue her *tele a tele* with Mr. Sutton. Thora resolved not to stir until the visitor should take her leave.

"I prefer to have my tea first," she answered, noting that her father had provided a large plum cake, as if to mark her home coming by some slight attention.

Instinctively she asked herself:—

"Was this in honour of the daughter, or the guest?"

"But you are eating nothing," remarked Addie. "How do you think your father is looking?"

"Very well; in fact, much better than I expected, since he has had no change."

"Not everybody," replied the girl coldly, "has rich friends willing to invite them to the country."

She leaned across the table and toyed familiarly with a vase of flowers, breaking off a blossom without question, and fastening it into her dress.

So Mr. Sutton had purchased roses to adorn the feast. Was this in honour of the daughter or the guest?

"Come now," said Addie, "you're very silent, Mr. Sutton. I shall think you are not pleased to see Thora back if you lose your tongue in this way."

She pulled another flower from the vase, and held it under his nose.

"Nice smell, isn't it?" she added. "Would just suit your button-hole. Come nearer, and I'll pin it in. Oh, dear! I haven't a pin. Could you fetch me one, Thora?"

The girl rose. Never had she looked so tall and stately. The beauty of that impassive face, controlled from showing any sign of emotion by a power of will unknown to Addie Meal, awed the speaker into sudden silence. She was not sure if some scathing remark would be hurled in her direction, and she re-called the old school superstition with a shudder.

"A pin," said Thora. "Oh, yes! there will be one in my room."

She walked away, her head held high. Addie wondered how she managed to move so gracefully, and hated her for the slow measured step. Thora's intention of sitting

the visitor out suddenly took the road of many other resolutions. She could no longer bear the presence of the man and woman who appeared so admirably suited to each other.

"And he," she gasped, "he dared to marry my mother, when he could fall in love with a girl like that?"

She shut herself into her room, and, ringing for the maid, gave her a box of pins, simply saying:—

"Take these to Miss Meal."

The arrival of the servant set Addie thinking. She wondered if after all there could be anything in the Evil Eye.

Mr. Sutton hardly missed his daughter from the table. Doubtless she was glad to rest. He and Miss Meal always found much to say to each other. They sat with their heads close together, talking in undertones, more than once he pressed her hand. At last the striking of the clock warned her it was half-past six.

"Why, I've been here two hours," she cried. "How time flies when one is with an interesting companion."

"I will see you home," he said.

Addie eased on her gloves, glad to delay departure. Mr. Sutton offered to fasten them, a clumsy proceeding which caused her some pain. Then they started out together, Addie omitting to bid Thora good-bye.

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"I say, I never remembered about your daughter," she gasped, after they had walked some yards, "does it matter? Shall I go back?"

"Oh, no," replied the man indifferently. "She's all right, daresay she was busy unpacking"

"Of course, it is a bother taking out one's twos and threes. I'm a bit afraid, Mr. Sutton, Thora will have something to say about me. Girls are so jealous of each other, and she must have seen that you and I were—well—friends—very great friends—to put it mildly. You won't let her run me down, will you?"

"Good Heavens! no! What must you think of me, Addie?"

"I think you are the best man on earth, and I wonder your daughter doesn't just adore you. I can't understand her behaviour. Why, after being away all this time, she would not even stay a few moments and talk. It's my belief she was sulking, and you will have a fine time of it to-night."

With this somewhat unpleasant supposition in his mind, Mr. Sutton returned to the flat. He found Thora arranging flowers. She had put aside the bought roses, and was filling every available vase with fresh blooms from the country.

"Doesn't the room look nice?" she said.

"Yes; quite festive, for a change.

Wish we'd had it like this for Miss Meal to see. Such a display seems rather wasted just on ourselves."

"But I brought them, father—just for ourselves."

She looked him straight in the eyes with an expression which made him redden. He stood like one accused.

"I know what you are thinking," he muttered. "You women have such quick instincts, you see a thing at once. I'm rather taken with Addie Meal. I've suffered enough, the Lord knows."

Thora retained the calm manner which so little expressed her real feelings. She writhed beneath the effort, yet gloried in her victory. Oh, if the floodgates of scorn were let loose! If!

"Isn't it rather soon to be contemplating a second marriage?"

She might have been utterly indifferent, so toneless was her voice.

"Yes; naturally, I shall do nothing disrespectful to your dear mother's memory. I hope I should never err in good taste. I have spoken to Addie of my recent sorrow, and tried to establish an understanding with her, without committing myself. I gather she would be quite willing to take pity on me when the correct period of mourning has elapsed."

Thora pressed her hands together, a short, sharp laugh escaped her.

"Correct! correct!" she murmured. "I hate that word. It's ridiculous—it's suburban—it's small. Of what consequence are we in the world? Don't you know, father, the insignificant people are always the most concerned as to what other insignificant people will think? The things of the heart alone matter, and if your heart is ready, why delay? The sooner you are happy the better, both for yourself, and Addie Meal."

Mr. Sutton gasped with startled joy.

"You advise a speedy marriage?" he cried, his face breaking into smiles.

"Why not? It makes no difference. You love her."

"Dear child, I little dreamed you would be so sympathetic. Of course, it will make the house much pleasanter for you, having a cheerful companion. Now, some step-mothers would be very hard to get on with, but I fancy you will find nothing to complain of in the woman of my choice. She is young like yourself, and such a good house-keeper, has been admirably trained under an excellent parent. I foresee bright days ahead."

He came nearer, as if to embrace Thora, but she shrank back, and his hands fell to his side, finding her unresponsive.

"It must be an excellent thing for a man to discover a woman who is his counterpart in ideas, taste, position, and aspira-

tions," she said. "I congratulate you, father."

He moved about the room whistling. His step was almost boyish again.

Thora watched him with a feeling of wonder, half terrified at the distance between them. Surely they were far apart as pole from pole, in the little room. Where was "the call of the blood?" Addie Meal had crushed their chance of hearing, feeling, or knowing the secret which draws a father to a child. Yet the daughter had never understood him better, and the shock of revelation chilled her to the bone.

In a shadowy corner she fancied she saw a grey gowned figure, with knitting held between cold hands, and a scarf of tulle floating upon her shoulders. It was but a mental picture of an old familiar form, yet it hallowed the atmosphere with romance. The ghost woman knew, perchance, what lay beneath her daughter's outward calm, and the thought of her sympathy soothed.

"I'll pop round to-night to the Meals, as Addie was inclined to misjudge you," said Mr. Sutton. "I should like her to know how decent you've been about everything, and I feel it's time I made a clean breast of my intentions to Mrs. Meal, who is naturally anxious about her daughter's future. Shall you mind being left alone, my dear?"

"Oh, no, father. I want to write to Mrs. Barcroft."

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He nodded assent, and smiled broadly.

"My remembrances," he said.

The letter to Muriel was full of mystery.

"*Re*—resolutions," wrote Thora, "I've probed the very depths, or should I say the very shallows of my father's heart, and I find I have never really misunderstood him. The hopes I had of my home are rather uncertain at present, and I think before long I shall be a lonely female, seeking my fortune in London. I send back to Dream Hall all the dreams of the past. They are better buried—cremate them in the red of the sunset, or lay them in some cool spot —'just when evening turns the blue vault grey.' I am writing rubbish, you know, because the real things of the moment are too pitiful to write."

Muriel handed the letter to Phil.

"You said you feared to see her on the rocks," he remarked as he read. "She seems to be nearing them already. But she hasn't given herself a chance. What could she find out in one evening?"

Muriel shook her head.

"I shall write back: 'Try, try, try again.' No, I will wire those four words, and tell her in a letter that the cremation is not yet. Dreams which are born in solitude can grow to realities in crowded cities. Thora may learn this when she has studied the Book of Experience."



CHAPTER IX

AN OPEN INSULT

"CONGRATULATE you, Mr. Sutton," said a friend in the train, peering over a newspaper, and nodding to the widower. "Hear you are to be married again."

"Ah! thanks. I'm sure it's a good move on my part, couldn't stand life alone, you know."

"I was told the news yesterday, we've been suspecting you of something of the kind."

Mr. Sutton coloured. He believed it possible that such women as Mrs. and Miss Meal could keep his secret safely from their small world. He knew that Thora would never name his love affair until he made it public himself.

"My daughter has been very good about it," he said, "quite approves, and all that, so we shall be a happy trio. I should have hung back longer but for her advice."

He thought, as he spoke, of Thora's amiability on what might have been a painful subject. As usual, she puzzled him, knowing as he did her intense devotion to her mother. There had been a gracious dignity in all her dealings with the Meal family. No jarring word passed her lips, she accepted the situation with cheerfulness and resignation.

Addie felt slightly aggrieved that Thora's attitude deprived her of the expected opportunity of proving herself "on the top rail." Without competition, this enviable position lost half its charm.

"I believe the storm will come yet," Addie confided to her mother. "Thora is just play-acting, but inwardly she is bitter. She pretends to be glad that I am to dethrone her, as if any woman ever relished taking a back seat."

"The struggle may follow afterwards," said Mrs. Meal, "but you and Ralph must brook no nonsense. Have it all your own way from the first. Let her feel the daughter is second to the wife."

"It's wonderful, considering their different natures, how well she and her father hit it off at present. Of course, he is with me most of the time, and then she spends hours in reading, and writing letters to people she does not trouble to introduce to us."

All arrangements were ready for a quiet wedding ceremony and a short trip to the seaside, seven months having elapsed since Mr. Sutton's bereavement. During that period, Thora frequently visited the Barcrofts, always with the air of one who awaits a climax.

She never told Muriel if Ezra had written again. Whenever his name was mentioned, she quickly turned the subject, or whispered: "let me forget."

As the wedding day approached, she proved, in a hundred ways, how useful she could be in helping her father with preparations.

"I'd like the bed-room done up differently," he said, "in a light colour for choice. Somehow I always think of your poor mother as she lay there after she was dead."

"I'll twist the furniture about into different places, and get some new curtains made," Thora replied, in the unmoved voice which soothed him strangely. "The chairs, too, shall have fresh covers."

With very little expense, she succeeded in changing the character of the room, in a manner which thoroughly appealed to her father's taste. She knew the style instinctively.

"If I get everything I most dislike, he and Addie will be charmed," she thought. "At least it will take mother away. The sacred atmosphere must be banished. She is to go. Her ideas would clash with the new ménage. Father—in the end—has come to his own!"

It was the morning of the marriage. Mr. Sutton, proud of his new frock coat, looked smilingly at Thora as she poured out his tea.

"I don't think I shall make such a bad bridegroom in these clothes," he said. "I suppose you will dress after breakfast. By the way, I forgot to ask what you are going to wear. I presume you will throw off your mourning for this occasion."

He was warming his hands by the fire, the January day wore a threatening air, as of snow in store.

"I shall be glad to get to Brighton," he continued, "may see some sun there. By the way, you must take a warm wrap to the church, even if it hides your dress."

"I shall not be at the service, nor at the Meals' house afterwards," said Thora.

Her voice sounded a note of warning. Her father eyed her sharply.

"Not coming to my wedding!" he gasped, startled into anger by the announcement.

"No."

"But do you realise your absence will be an open insult to Adelaide and myself?"

"That does not matter."

The retort was spoken in cool, calculating accents.

A veil, worn securely for months, fell from Thora's face, as she flashed a look at him which betrayed the sudden passion in her soul.

"It certainly does not matter," she repeated. "Put it against the open insult you and Adelaide offer to-day to the memory of my dead mother."

Mr. Sutton dropped into a chair, and fiercely attacked a slice of bacon.

"A nice thing for you to hurl that in my teeth now—at the eleventh hour—when it is too late to turn back," he said, "especially after all I've suffered, with my wife

going mad, and you mixing yourself up with that Mormon devil. It's cruel, it's unreasonable—it's—it's a woman all over."

"Ah! there you are right, father. Women may be strong up to a point, then they fail—and break. I could no more go to your wedding than I could take up this knife, and draw it across my throat."

"You might have warned me, then I would have told the bride quietly, and prepared her for your strange conduct. I cannot help fearing, if you harbour these feelings, life will not be so peaceful on my return as I anticipated."

"Indeed, you have nothing to fear from me. I never had any intention of sharing my home with the second Mrs. Sutton."

The man's jaw dropped.

"Going away!" he cried. "You will not be here when I come back?"

She nodded her head, repeating his exclamation:

"I shall not be here when you come back. I have tried to help you—mechanically—ever since that horrible afternoon when I returned from Dream Hall, meaning to be a good daughter to you, meaning to fill my mother's place. I came into the house with all that was best in me (poor thing that I am), braced to endeavour. I was not in your presence five minutes before realising what had already happened between you and Addie Meal. I saw the useless-

ness of resistance. I didn't want to appeal to your finer feelings, they were not worth appealing to. I had more pride than to plead for the dead. I buried my indignation in the newly made grave, where she lay—the wife you pretended to love.”

Mr. Sutton rose, leaving his breakfast unfinished.

“I think,” he muttered, “your conduct is the most selfish I have ever experienced. You urged me on, yes, you know you did; you advised me to marry, and now it is too late to draw back, you round on me in this uncalled for manner. If I had any authority over you, I would insist upon your coming to the church, not out of filial duty to myself, but out of compliment to the lady I am about to make my wife.”

“The lady!” laughed Thora. “Yes, she belongs to the class in which every woman is ‘a lady.’ Oh, father, I’m sorry I said that, it was horrid of me. Addie can’t help being underbred, it’s not her fault. God knows how she attracted you, but since you love her, I—I apologise. You see, I am hardly myself to-day. Sometimes I think I shall go mad, like mother. If I were at the wedding, I might ‘see red.’ Do you know what that means? Mother ‘saw red’ on the day she died.”

Mr. Sutton turned pale.

“You are right,” he said. “I could not have you there—ill-wishing us. Since you’ve given me such a free opinion of

Addie, shall I tell you what she thinks of her future step-daughter? She believes in the Evil Eye. She says if you had lived in the old days you would have been burnt as a witch."

"Very likely. I have thought the same myself. Perhaps Addie has more sense than I gave her credit for. Tell her, father, she need fear no evil wish from me. If my prayers are worth having, they will be for your mutual happiness. While you are on your honeymoon, I mean to seek employment. Mrs. Barcroft says she can help me to a situation. When my mother has been dead a year, I may possibly come and call on you, but I do not intend to visit your wife until after that anniversary."

"It will look so very odd to the neighbours," gasped Mr. Sutton. "And Addie will feel most uncomfortable. She thinks so much of appearances."

"Then tell her that I have thought of appearances, too."

"You've played a double-faced game, Thora."

"I could not fight against circumstances. I swam with the tide through muddy water, and now I shake myself clean, that's all."

She had nothing more to say, and this final retort silenced Mr. Sutton. He went to his room, and thought over all that had passed. Somehow, Thora's words banished the glitter and glow of this great day for

him. His weak character could be unsettled by the smallest word. He told himself even now he might find some way of escape.

The time slipped by, and Thora, feeling she must still keep watch over him, noted the fleeting moments with care.

At last she knocked at his door.

"You ought to be starting in about ten minutes," she said.

He came out into the passage, an irritable, nervous bridegroom.

"Oh! ought I?" he muttered. "Well, it will be your fault if I don't start at all. You've upset me thoroughly, I can't forgive you, Thora."

"You will feel all right directly you are with the Meals. You like Addie's uncles, aunts, and cousins. They will help you to forget, and if forgiving is any trouble, don't bother about it at present."

"Addie's relations appreciate me. They are so pleasant and hearty. Still, I feel quite inclined to be taken ill, and not appear at the church. The ceremony can quite well be postponed until later—after the anniversary of my loss."

As he spoke, a bell rang, and he caught the sound of two familiar voices.

"Has Mr. Sutton started yet?" asked Mrs. Meal's well known treble.

"Don't tell him I'm here," in hushed accents from Addie, as dressed in white cloth, with a hard brimmed travelling hat, she hid behind the door.

Mrs. Meal came forward with outstretched hand.

"We know it is very unconventional," she said, "but they sent such a big landau, we thought we would come and fetch you to the church. We remembered you suggested walking, if fine, and Addie thought you would get your boots dusty."

Mr. Sutton expanded once more under Mrs. Meal's motherly smile.

"Just like you," he murmured, "full of kind thoughts and attentions."

"And there is plenty of room for Thora, too."

Her eyes fell on the girl in the black dress with disapproval.

"Not got your hat on yet?" she queried.

"Oh! Thora won't come," stammered Mr. Sutton. "She has a fit of the blues, and prefers to be alone."

The words brought Addie darting round the corner, a highly indignant bride.

"Thora not coming!" she exclaimed. "What next, I should like to know? Are we not good enough for her, pray?"

Thora watched their faces as if she were at a drama. She cared so little what they said or felt, and their undisguised annoyance afforded her no satisfaction.

"I have explained to my father my feelings on the subject," she said. "He can repeat them to you if he pleases. I wish you good luck, and—good-bye."

The last word was spoken with determination.

"She won't live with us either," Mr. Sutton added in angry accents. "I don't want all our neighbours saying I've driven my only daughter from her home. Tell her she must re-consider—tell her that, Addie."

The bride turned away.

"We shall be late if we stop arguing. Thora will go her own bent, you may be sure, Ralph. No holding a jealous girl. Perhaps when she gets a husband herself, she will think more kindly of me."

Mrs. Meal glanced back at the lonely figure.

"You are a foolish young person," she said, "to quarrel with your kith and kin, but of course if you please to cut yourself off, you mustn't be surprised if people talk."

The future husband and wife were already half way down the stairs. Mrs. Meal gathering up her skirt, hurried after them, conscious that Thora made no reply.

"Good looking," muttered the woman, "almost a beauty. I shouldn't be surprised if she's on the downward grade already. It's perhaps as well that Addie, who has always mixed with such respectable people, should be spared Thora Sutton's society." But despite this consoling thought the mother recalled, with heart burnings, her cherished hopes, that Thora might introduce Addie to Mrs. Barcroft and her Mayfair set.



CHAPTER X

NO RISK TOO GREAT

IT was her father's wedding night, and Thora sat alone in the deserted flat, with only her own thoughts for companions. She felt strangely restless. She tried to read, but her eyes, rather than her mind, followed the words, and she put her book down impatiently.

Six o'clock, and it had been dark outside for nearly two hours. She wondered how she would get through the long evening if this same sensation of unease continued. Possibly the idea of the future preyed upon her, for though she tried to form plans, they took no definite shape, merely leaving her brain in chaos.

She drew a chair close to the fire, and gazed in the bright bed of burning coal, as if in its fiery heart she might read her fate. Was not Ezra's face carved in the scarlet glow? She thought of him no longer as her lover, but as the leader of a people who had tramped through blood to gain their kingdom. She knew they despoiled the innocent, that murder and theft came largely into the early programme of their religion, while in the



name of God, these so-called "Saints" lured wives from their husbands, and mothers from their children. She put the picture away by stirring the coals. Now she would make herself see only pleasant visions. A panoramic scene of hilly islands in a great ocean, broad sheets of grass-covered plain, a landscape of gold and pearl, snow peaks burnished by the setting sun—the great Salt Lake Valley. How well Ezra had described that landscape—too fair a setting by far for "the most transparent pious fraud ever attempted to be palmed off on the credulity of mankind"—too sweet a soil in which to root vice and criminality.

The maid, who had asked permission earlier in the day to attend "the master's wedding," brought in a letter. She wore white flowers fastened above her apron which, she previously informed Thora, was a gift from the bride's mother.

"A letter by special messenger, Miss," she said.

Thora stared at the envelope, opening and shutting her eyes quickly, to make sure she was awake.

Ezra's writing! Could it be possible, when the letter came by hand? She told the servant to go, not daring to break the seal until she was alone. Then, with trembling fingers, she drew forth a sheet of writing paper which bore the address of a London hotel.

"My darling Thora," the letter began, "I have escaped from Utah, and for your sake I call myself no longer—Mormon. Accompanied by a trusted companion, I have arrived in London. My friend suspects my object, and though a brother in the faith himself, would never betray me, since I am his near kinsman. He is a great Saint, yet, to his praise I say it, this man of God can sympathise with the weakness of my human nature. All this weakness, dear beautiful Thora, I lay at your feet, with my heart's adoration. I have come to win you, to cherish and protect you, till death us do part. We will try, in Christian England, to live such pure, unselfish lives, that by our good works we may blot out my crime against the Mormon Church. I should be with you now, but am unfortunately indisposed. My good friend, Sidney Sharp, has nursed me on the journey through an acute attack of sickness. I feel I need only the sight of your face to make me convalescent. As you see, I am staying at the Langham Hotel. This letter should reach you soon after six o'clock; at half-past six, a carriage will come for you. I entreat you not to delay, but to drive immediately to the Langham, where we can talk over plans. You cannot refuse a sick man the sound of your voice, and the light of your eyes, for a few minutes. Sidney will be with me. I decided to come back to England soon after

NO RISK TOO GREAT III

receiving your final letter refusing to adopt my faith. I had tried to exist without you—it was impossible. No risk appears too great which gives me the opportunity of living at your side.

"Yours with devotion,

"Yours 'under the ban,'

"EZRA DYER."

The letter fluttered from her hands, she clutched the arms of the chair, and though the warmth of the fire enveloped her, she shuddered. Those last words had broken the magic spell, and struck dread to her soul. The worst and the best had happened together. He was near—in London—she was to see him that same hour, to touch his hand, perchance to press his lips, but for this joy he risked his life. The sharp sword of fear would lie between them, the curse of a powerful people whose Elder had strayed from the fold. Well she knew the latitude the Church took in applying punishment—that its leaders made no concealment among themselves of their right to forfeit the lives of those they considered offenders.

Yet, oh! the joy of looking on Ezra again. No longer to see him in imagination, but to stand face to face. What demon of dread could take from her the almost unbearable pleasure of this glad thought? She sprang up, catching a glimpse of her radiant face in a glass above the mantelshelf.

"Ezra is ill, and I look like that," she said wonderingly. "He is in danger, but I can't help smiling. I am going to see him again."

The clock struck half-past six.

She ran to her room, and snatched up her hat and cloak.

"The carriage should be there," she thought, startled by the beating of her heart.

In her cheeks the bright pink of excitement added to the girl's beauty. Mourning made a striking background to her vivid colouring, and the glorious youth within her.

No one to bid her stay at home. No mother to wound, no father to miss her, no friend to guide. In the last few moments all her life had changed. She was the affianced wife of a man who—"called himself no longer Mormon."

She raced down the stairs, every nerve strung to its highest tension. Life was beginning; to-day she realised the true meaning of the verb, "to live." Outside, a brougham waited, and a groom stepped forward to inquire if she were Miss Sutton.

"Yes."

He opened the door, and she entered the cosy carriage. The man threw a fur rug over her knees, a hot water tin warmed her feet, while facing her on a ledge, a bunch of forced lilac heralded the spring.

She pressed the flowers to her lips,

before fastening them into her dress. She forgot all the gloom of the past day, forgot the honeymoon couple at Brighton, since the moment had come when her own romance dominated all memory, all sensation. She still felt dazed by the shock of surprise Danger! why think of it to-night? Tomorrow let sorrow come, but this evening they must rejoice over the gladness of re-union.

The horses bore her swiftly through streets which were growing white under snow flakes whirling in confusion against the carriage windows, touching the commonplace scene with mystery and change. The pure pale sheet, spreading its chill mantle on the pavement, made her journey more dream-like and unreal. Cinderella in the glass coach could not have felt more electrified than Thora, as Ezra's carriage carried her far from the cramping influence of home.

When she alighted at the hotel, the groom accompanied her to the hall, where he told an attendant to take her to Mr. Dyer's sitting-room.

As she neared the door she could picture, even before their meeting, Ezra's face hungry with love, parted lips, and eager eyes, cheeks still pale from his recent illness. Happiness must surely work a cure, or if he ailed, London held the finest medical skill.

"Miss Sutton," her guide announced.

She went quickly forward. The room, large, and luxuriously furnished, held one figure alone. She saw instantly the occupant was not Ezra.

A stranger greeted her with outstretched hand.

"Welcome, sister, and God bless you," he said. "I must introduce myself. I am Sidney Sharp."

His strong family likeness to Ezra struck her instantly. He was older, or appeared so, with grey streaked hair, and a lined countenance. The voice, the clothes, the whole manner, suggested his kinsman.

"How is Mr. Dyer?" she asked anxiously.

"My poor friend is very unwell, I regret to tell you, and I am thankful you have come. He is confined to his bed by the doctor's orders. Most kind of you to turn out on such a night, at this unconventional hour too."

"What is the matter with him?"

"That is exactly what I want to know. Ever since we left Utah, he has suffered from sharp attacks of illness at intervals. For a time I was inclined to put it down to nerves, knowing, as I did, that his great affection for you preyed on his mind. Now that I have the pleasure of seeing you in the flesh, may I say I am no longer surprised at his desire to return to England?"

"Mr. Dyer is the last man in the world

I should suspect of falling a victim to a nervous complaint," said Thora, perplexed.

"I am inclined to agree with you. I changed my opinion on the voyage. I fear there may be some organic trouble, but the doctor who called to-day, though evidently puzzled, sees no cause for immediate alarm."

"Will you take me to Mr. Dyer?" asked the girl, abruptly, feeling she could not bear to lose another second of precious time. Her impatience bubbled up, and made her appear momentarily discourteous to Mr. Sharp.

He smiled.

"The meeting means much to you both, I observe. Believe me, I am a true sympathiser, for love is one of the holy inspirations sent to us directly from the Great Spirit. Its presence in the human heart is one of the manifestations of God's power. He makes His poor creatures divine. Love on, dear sister, and your garments will be spotless, pure and white."

A feeling of irritation crept over Thora. Why was he delaying? His very likeness to Ezra gave her a pang, for the man she loved had the quick brain which never keeps another waiting, never prosés, or postpones.

Sidney turned, and began thrusting his arms into the sleeves of a fur coat. A sudden idea seized her.

"Is he not here—with you?"

"Unfortunately, no. When he wrote

the letter you received, he had every intention of remaining in these rooms, which we engaged together. The doctor, however, hinted at the possibility of having to operate to-morrow should his condition not improve, and strongly urged his instant transference to a nursing home in Devonshire Street, which is close by. He would only go on condition you were allowed to visit him there this evening. The carriage is waiting for us. Don't look so startled, I feel convinced it is nothing serious. Careful nursing will soon restore him to health and strength."

Thora clasped her hands over her heart, she breathed hard.

"I am frightened," she said, "and I mustn't let him see. Give me a moment to calm myself—to collect my thoughts."

She sank into a chair, and covered her eyes.

"Crying?" queried Sidney Sharp. "Come, this won't do. You must pull yourself together. There is no reason for alarm."

"Why should he be so mysteriously ill? London doctors are not often puzzled."

There was something fierce in her look and tone, quite out of keeping with the girlish face and figure. She dashed a hasty tear aside, and set her lips in a firm line.

"If I dared," replied the man, "I would call upon the Elders, and request them to pray to the Lord for this our brother. But while you fear for the state of his body, I tremble for the welfare of his soul. All is

not well with his spiritual state, but I must not name it, lest I bring evil upon him, and a judgment which no hand can stay."

"You talk in riddles," said Thora, trembling.

"Yet I fancy," he replied, "you could interpret my meaning. Many of our Elders at Salt Lake have the gift of healing, accomplished by the prayer of faith. By our holy men in the Mormon religion, I have seen almost lifeless clay resuscitated, while the human hand which revived the patient knew nothing of medical science. To God all the praise was given. This curing of sickness can only be obtained by contemplating heaven, and heavenly things."

"Oh! if you could work some such miracle," sighed Thora.

"It is my intention to try to do so this very night. I have obtained permission to sit up with Ezra. He hated the idea of being left with strangers, for he and I, though really first cousins, are more like brothers. I shall spend the hours of vigil on my knees, treasuring the hope I may have a revelation of the Supreme Healer. I might see an angel, as our great prophet Joseph was wont to do."

A fanatical expression transformed the speaker's face as he whispered the words, and though his appearance awed her, Thora was no longer interested, since she did not believe in visions.

" I am ready to go now, will you come ? " she said.

" Certainly."

He followed her to the door.

" You are a brave girl," he murmured, " and I see you love Ezra truly, for your eyes are true. Some day I may be able to save your soul alive, even though our brother cannot turn you to the faith, even though he himself falls away from grace. God has given us Mormons the power to rescue souls from hell by being baptised for them."

Thora thought of the loathsome crimes and vile practices for which the name " Mormon " had become a proverb, and wished with all her heart that Ezra had returned alone. She wondered if Sidney Sharp were really to be trusted. Might he not try to dissuade Ezra from giving up Mormonism, even now, after his resolve had been formed ?

" Is it true," she asked, " that your people consider a man has a right to do anything he pleases, provided he obtains a revelation to that effect ? "

" Certainly. Our system is based on immediate revelation."

" Then tell me this," she added quickly. " If men and women who have been married in the Church of England embrace Mormon doctrines, are they at liberty to desert their wives, turn away from their husbands, and cast off their children ? "

Mr. Sharp looked at her keenly. At last he replied in a low whisper :—

“ The Church of England marriage vow is neither binding nor legal. Have you, my poor child, been secretly married in this way ? If so, trust in me, and I will set your mind at rest, I will give you freedom.”

Thora felt her anger rising, but she controlled herself with an effort. To show offence was not to learn, and at last she felt she was getting at the root of these Mormon creeds.

“ No, I am not married,” she said, with a dignity which was all her own.

“ But perhaps you know some unhappy woman in these bonds ? ”

“ Many ; but I do not agree with you that it is possible to break them, and call yourself religious. Married women in England cannot fathom, even in thought, how polygamous wives tolerate their home life.”

“ You talk of a system which, as an English girl, you have no right to judge,” he murmured kindly, with a certain fatherly manner which did not quite convince. “ I have no wish to force my beliefs upon you, and hurt your feelings, I am merely here as my cousin’s friend, though you know me as one of the Latter Day Saints. The principle of polygamy is, according to our lights, a correct one, and I do not hesitate to say there is no salvation without it.”

He emphasised the last words in penetrating tones.

Thora was back in the carriage, and the flash of passing lights showed up Sidney's eyes, with their riveted expression.

She listened, staggered by the audacity of his ideas. Her silence gave him courage.

"When a man is wealthy," he continued, "it is his distinct duty to support more than one woman, his choice naturally being subject to the President of the Church obtaining a revelation as to whether the marriage is pleasing to God. I go further, and say that the priesthood compel—so far as in their power lies—all prominent members of the Church to increase their number of wives. It would indeed be a poor business for a Saint to confine himself to one woman, and go into heaven practically alone. Mind you, he rescues from damnation the souls of those women who are sealed to him in the faith. Polygamy is essential to eternal salvation. But you are uninitiated, and cannot fathom the work of God, as shown in the principles of plurality."

Thora shuddered to think that a man, with such beliefs, should be seated next her in the carriage. She hated to feel he was Ezra's cousin, and Ezra's friend.

"I fear you are not with me, Miss Sutton, but I could hardly expect that you would be, seeing you have been reared in the narrow ignorance of your native country."

The girl drew away, tossing her head disdainfully.

"It was my fault," she said, "a fault of curiosity, which made it possible for you to even speak of such things to me. If our friendship is to continue, I must beg you never to name the subject again. To decent minded English people, be they men or women, it is an odious crime, both against the religious and moral sense of Christendom. You practise it 'under the rose,' you dare not do openly what you preach amongst your own people. I have read much of the agony and heart burnings experienced by wretched women whose husbands have become polygamists. That, and a hundred other reasons, decided me not to join your Church."

"You wasted your pity," he replied, still absolutely unruffled by her argument. "Since our Mormon women believe, rightly, that their souls' safety relies upon these sacred 'sealed' marriages, and that the more children they bring into the world the more souls they assist to salvation, they are zealous advocates of polygamy. I believe that our Mormon Church will eventually dominate all nations. Those who now look on us with contempt, have no conception of our rapid increase and far reaching power."

The horses were moving at a snail's pace, for the frozen snow made the road like

a sheet of glass. The groom had alighted, and walked at the head of the unroughed pair.

"It has taken us quite a long time to go this short distance," said Thora, peering out, and remembering she must return to West Kensington. "Are we nearly there?"

"Yes. This is Devonshire Street. You see the door with a light above it. That's the nursing home."

In a moment Sidney Sharp and his conversation passed from her mind like an ugly dream. Once more Ezra was near. Her love had drawn him from the paths of error. Her devotion, and the knowledge that what they did was right, would surely avert any catastrophe. Let him be "under the ban!" What did she care for these canting hypocrites of Mormons? Probably their threatened revenge was merely a fraud to strike fear into the minds of weak brethren who dared not confess to differing opinions.

Ezra was a man of courage. He could not be cowed into submission. Here in London, hired detectives would watch his safety. Her love, too, must detect any plot against him. Thank heaven, he had shaken the dust of Utah from his feet, and thrown off the licentious creed.

She entered the Home with a smile on her lips.

"He was better," they told her, and waiting eagerly for his visitor.

She ran up the stairs, hearing the number of his room.

"Don't follow me," she called to Mr. Sharp. "Come up presently."

"They are lovers," whispered Sidney to the nurse, and his eyes stole over the woman's neatly gowned figure with an expression that set her blushing. "Have you a lover?" he added softly.

She shook her head.

"No time," she answered, laughing.

"Oh! nonsense," said Sidney. "Life is just long enough for love."

"Your opinion," murmured the nurse.

"And yours, too, if you knew it," he said, as he slipped a visiting card into her hand.

She moved away, but glanced back, and made a sign that she would keep the card.

CHAPTER XI

SOUL TO SOUL

EZRA was sitting up in bed, with both hands held out in greeting. Thora flew into his arms.

"It's you," he gasped, "it's you," as if unable to realise his good fortune.

He held up her face and kissed it—lips, eyes, hair.

"The same Ezra," she whispered, gazing at him intently, "yet not the same. Free to love, and to be loved."

She yielded to his passionate clasping, she felt her heart beating upon his own. The moments were enchanted. They could only speak in breathless snatches, so wild was the tumult of their joy.

"Oh! these last months," he told her, "they are written down as a lifetime. I would not live them again for a thousand worlds, not even for the rapture of this hour, Thora. Waiting to know if you would come to me, battling with myself in prayer, fighting to escape from the chains of custom, and the iron bands of faith, ready to burst them, for your presence, your smile, your kiss. See, already I am resurrected. That

doctor to-day tried to make me believe my illness would be a long affair. 'It's a sickness of the soul,' I told him. 'To-night I shall be cured.' 'Funny symptoms for soul sickness,' he said, with a little twinkle in his eye. 'It's my business to get your body right first, and you must have careful nursing, and a strict diet.' So here I am—and you are with me. I hardly dared to hope that you would come. How did you escape your father? There's one thing, they won't let him in here, even if he swears his daughter is with a Mormon—which isn't true."

"Father married again to-day. I was left quite alone, only myself and one servant in the flat. Think what it meant to me when your letter came, and the carriage with the lilacs!"

She broke a spray of the flowers to place on his pillow.

"You went to the hotel first?"

"Yes."

"I wanted Sidney to explain. Oh, my love, you can't imagine how it hurt me to think this illness of mine might alarm you. I told Sidney to bring you on here without a moment's delay. He is all kindness. You like him, don't you?"

Thora hesitated.

"He is my cousin, you know," Ezra added, seeing she did not reply.

"Because of his relationship to you I

must try and like him," she said gently. "He has been talking to me of his religion, and of course we could not agree. I can see no beauty or light in the Mormon teachings, and for that reason I had meant never to meet you again. But now that you tell me you are 'under the ban,' I fear what I have done. What if I should bring danger upon you? Have you reflected? Is your decision wise? Can you shake off the convictions of a lifetime?"

Ezra grasped her hand in both his own, and laid his head upon her shoulder.

"At first I thought there was no way. Then, in my daily struggle against this love and you, I realised my Thora had entwined herself round my heart, with ties that are stronger than death. No creed, no distance of continents could sever you from my mind. Every moment of the night and day, I hoped that you would join me, conquering your prejudices against Mormonism, to labour with me in the vineyard. When I heard of your dear mother's death, I laid the matter before my friend Sidney, and together we united in prayer that you might be added to the Saints. Sidney declared the Lord signified to him by the voice of the Spirit that you would certainly be joined to us. When your letter came it proved to me that Sidney was under some delusion, it made me waver for the first time. I will not tell you now all that

wavering meant to me. I could neither eat nor sleep, every one noticed my condition. It was suggested that I needed change, and should start again on a mission, preaching and baptising wherever opportunity afforded. I agreed, merely for the excuse to leave our community. I said the Spirit led me back to England."

"Oh, Ezra! what will they do when they discover the truth?"

"I did not leave them long in ignorance. Sidney, who already suspected my intention, offered to come with me, seeing my bad state of health. He is as good as a doctor, and nursed me with unfailing attention. He told me that no matter of religion could ever lessen his brotherly love for me."

"Was it quite safe to take him into your confidence?"

Ezra smiled reassuringly.

"I think so. He thoroughly understands the difficulties I have passed through. The night before we left Utah, I addressed a meeting—just a few farewell words. During my speech I was seized with a kind of paroxysm, my face became contorted, I was left in a state of complete exhaustion. The people believed it to be a display of the power of God, but Sidney told me afterwards he feared the spirit of the devil had attacked me in a violent manner. I left with blessings showered upon me by a vast company of the faithful. By the time

I was on the sea, they had received the news, in my own handwriting, that I had seceded from the Mormon Church."

"Were you wise to tell them, to place them on your track?"

"Brother Sidney says if he remains beside me, they will think I may yet reconsider my decision. His presence is a great protection, and we must be deeply grateful to him for sharing, in a measure, my risk."

"Is the risk as terrible as we fear?" asked Thora, in a whisper. "Do you really mean that 'under the ban' implies under sentence of death?"

"I don't wish to alarm you, Thora, but since you are to share my future, it would not be right to deceive you. The Mormon Church declared openly, under Brigham Young, its right to mete out capital punishment. The era of blood, started in 'The Reformation' in 1856, reaches on to the present time. At that date the system of church espionage surrounded the inhabitants of the valley with an impassable barrier, for to use Brigham Young's own phrase, 'Directly a person leaves these people, he is cut off from every object that is desirable for time and eternity.' I could never have escaped had I not left in the guise of a lying hypocrite. I only carried such a stigma so long as it was absolutely necessary. Now I am a

confessed rebel, and in their eyes should be hewn down."

Thora gave a little cry. His white face suggested that already there might be foul play.

"What of your illness?" she said. "Doesn't it strike you that even now they may be at work plotting against your life? Could your enemies have managed to poison you in some subtle manner, which might account for your strange sickness?"

"I see no possibility of such a thing. The symptoms began too soon, even before I had left Utah. That strange seizure, while speaking, was, I believe, a bad attack of nerves, caused by the knowledge of what I was about to do. Later, I would lie for hours in a torpid state, too weary to wish for life, or even to remember you, my love. It struck me that on one of these occasions I might fail to recover, so I took the precaution of making my will. I have left you all my fortune, Thora, which is a very large one."

He drew a document from under his pillow, and pressed it into her hand.

"That," he said, "is my last will and testament. It contains a letter to my English solicitor. I also wrote to him to-day, telling him that if anything happened to me, all instructions as to certain property I have here were lodged with you, my affianced wife. I have also large estates in Salt Lake, which you would inherit."

"Oh, Ezra, I can't bear to hear you talk of such things. It makes me fear you must be feeling very ill. What would all the money be to me, if you were not here to guide my life, to—to love me?"

The tears had started to her eyes, and were falling on his hands.

"Don't grieve, dear heart. I would not say anything to hurt you, but the fact of making plans, and being prepared, does not bring about a tragedy. Often people think to name death implies that the enemy is at the door. I feel wonderfully strong and well to-night, and have no intention of submitting to an operation to-morrow. The doctor just wants to make a voyage of exploration, but I shall refuse to satisfy his curiosity. Begin your selection of a trousseau immediately, and don't consider money."

His cheerful tones soothed Thora. They talked of the life in store, deciding where they would pass the days of honeymooning, which reminded her that Mr. Sutton was spending his first evening at Brighton with Addie. If he could see his daughter now, standing beside her future husband, the Mormon Elder through whom her mother died, would it blight his happiness? She decided to tell him nothing of Ezra's return until after her marriage.

"Does it pain you to think you will never see Salt Lake again?" she asked.

He turned his eyes away for the first time, that she might not trace the cloud in them. Her innocent question came as a blow. The faces of his many friends suddenly flashed before him, kindly, sociable companions. He saw, too, the radiant city in all its floral beauty, the roof gardens ablaze with bloom, the stately buildings, and signs of prosperity, everywhere giving evidence to the wonderful enterprise of the Mormon people. Outwardly, in that far away town, harmony reigned supreme. In the streets a drunkard rarely made appearance, and the sound of oaths or profane imprecations was never heard.

"It is natural to love one's own land, and possibly to regret it," he murmured. "I shall never again lead repentant souls into the waters of baptism, or lay my hands upon them for the reception of the Holy Spirit. I was always a travelling Elder, going about the world, exhorting the heathen to remember the revelations of the Doctrine and Covenants. If any asked me in the past, 'Where is Zion?' I would reply, 'In Utah.' It makes my blood boil when I think of the persecutions our poor Saints suffered in the past, before we established ourselves as a great and prosperous kingdom."

"I suppose from the first your people met with violent opposition."

Thora watched, with a sinking heart, his eyes brighten when he talked of the

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community his love for her had forced him to renounce.

"Indeed, yes," he murmured, and she felt the tightening of his fingers, while a rapt expression came over the flushed face. "Earth and hell combined together to wreck our work. We were called impostors, and all manner of slanderous lies added to the number of our enemies. Jews and Gentiles alike were against us. Great companies of Christians, carrying a sword in one hand, and the Bible in the other, attempted the annihilation of the unoffending Latter Day Saints, murdering their wives and daughters, shooting even little children, lest they should grow to be Mormons like their fathers. But no amount of butchery could disestablish us. We have ever treated adverse criticism with the indifference the Mahomedans show to those who disbelieve their teachings. Outsiders can do us no harm: it is only when there is a wolf within the fold—a seceder, like myself—that vengeance falls."

"You are with them, and yet against them," said Thora. "If you should care for me less in the future, I shall appear to have wrecked your life. I know enough of Mormonism to realise how strong it is. These mighty Mormons have certainly established the third political system that has grown out of Christianity; the only State Church in America is that which Joseph

Smith, your martyred prophet, founded. I do not believe love can make up to you for what you have relinquished. Had you not better re-consider? Let me once more kiss the man—Ezra—and then go back,—go back to be Elder Dyer, and make your peace with your Church."

She spoke passionately. Her voice shook with the emotion of stifled sobs and tears withheld. She saw him once more entrenched within a fortress, the impregnable barrier of his beliefs, and the theology which that amazing imposture, the Book of Mormon, had rooted in his mind.

She bent over him as if to say good-bye but he caught her fast, and laughed aloud.

"Lose you now, my precious," he cried. "Let you go, when I have travelled all these weary days, to make you my own—relinquish a prize for which I am ready to sacrifice my life? Dear one, you must think me mad. You led me on to talk of Salt Lake, and being weak with illness, the subject momentarily carried me away. Let us agree never again to mention old times. They must be buried in a grave of memory, on which we will plant orange blossoms. My God! when I think what I suffered without you, it's like a nightmare. Don't threaten to leave me unless you would have me kill myself. We will escape the vengeance together, and make life sweet, so sweet, my Thora."

His words banished all dread reflections.

Once more they were smiling, as locked in each other's arms, they vowed eternal love which no human power could mar or thwart.

Before they had time to start apart, Sidney stole into the room.

Thora heard his step, as if by instinct, and drew away with a blush.

"The nurse wants Ezra to rest now," he said. "She thinks too much excitement is bad for him, and will disturb his night's repose. I regret to tell you, Miss Sutton, the snow storm has increased. If you will allow me, I should suggest accompanying you to the door of your home. The carriage is waiting, and the coachman says he will have to drive very slowly, as the roads are almost impassable."

Thora remembered their conversation, and Mr. Sharp's strange views upon marriage. After her interview with Ezra, she longed only for solitude, that she might re-live again in fancy every emotion and thrill.

"You are kind," she answered, "to suggest such a sacrifice, but I would rather you stayed and looked after Ezra. I shall be all right alone. In fact, it would be better so—more in keeping with our English customs. You see, I am a girl living unchaperoned for the time, and under the circumstances I have to be rather particular."

"For the sake of appearances, yes," said Ezra. "But I would trust my future

bride in dear old Sidney's care, at any hour of the night or day. He," pointing to his friend, "is the salt of the earth, Thora." Then added with a twinkle—"From Salt Lake, you know."

Sidney shook his head.

"Come, come, this won't do. I cannot listen to flattery, which is an abomination. We must never glory in earthly praises. Let our hearts be in Heaven, while we hope, with all humility, that our names are written in the Book of Life, sealed there as a perpetual memorial before the face of the Most High."

His pious words gave Thora no sense of reverence when she re-called his belief in polygamy.

"Good-bye," she whispered, bending over Ezra.

"You will come again to-morrow?"

His pleading eyes seemed devouring her with love.

"Yes; as early as they will allow me. Is there anything I can bring you?"

"Only your beautiful self. Let no weather stop you, order the carriage again. It is your own, to use when you please, until we are married. Bring it often to this door. And Thora," drawing her down so that his lips were to her ear, "don't lose that document I gave you. Lock it up in a safe place. Shall you tell your father you have seen me?"

"No."

"Wise girl. By the way, you might take Mrs. Barcroft into your confidence. I am sure she will be sympathetic, and do all she can to help us. Perhaps she will come to our wedding, ask her from me."

"Yes. She cannot object when she hears of the courageous step you have taken for my sake."

"God bless you, my little girl. May I kiss you once again?"

He pressed her lips with fervour. She felt giddy, and half afraid, at his passionate pressing, till the woman's instinct in her seemed to leap up and conquer that sudden fear. Oh! it was good to be thus, soul to soul, with Sidney Sharp discreetly screened by the half closed door. He coughed impatiently, and then Nurse Baker entered—the young woman who had accepted Mr. Sharp's card.

"You have come to send me away," said Thora.

"I'm afraid so. Already we have made quite an exception of your visit, which is long past the usual calling hour," replied the woman, looking curiously at the youthful beauty of the girl.

"Till to-morrow," said Ezra breezily. "See nurse, how she has revived me. The spring came into the room, though it is snowing outside, and left me one of her children."

He held up the lilac spray, which matched the bouquet in Thora's dress.

"Till to-morrow," echoed the departing visitor, "when I will bring you some fresh flowers."

Sidney followed her, anxious to conduct her to the carriage.

"I do wish you would let me escort you home," he urged.

She thanked him again, but firmly declined.

"I can't help thinking," he said, "that Ezra will be up and out to-morrow. He has such marvellous recuperative powers. Remember, all night long I shall be supplicating for his recovery."

"Watch well, and pray well," said Thora, envious of Brother Sidney's mission.

"The prayer of a righteous man availeth much," he murmured. "Perchance, in the morning all will be well."

He watched the black gowned figure flit through the snow to the carriage, then Sidney Sharp turned away, with a dark message from hell written in his lowered eyes.

"Curse her fair face, the she-devil," he muttered under his breath. "It's her damnable beauty has caught our Brother's soul, and charred it in the everlasting flames of perdition. I would like to see her tarred and feathered by a Mormon mob, but undoubtedly the Spirit will lead her to destruction."

He continued murmuring incoherent words as he retraced his steps.

Nurse Baker came upon him suddenly on the stairs.

"Good gracious!" she exclaimed, "what are you talking about, Mr. Sharp?"

"I have had a revelation from Heaven, dear sister," he replied, taking her arm. "Do you know, it is my constant practice to hold personal intercourse with God and His angels. I was speaking then in unknown tongues. If you were to turn your back on all your doctors, I would soon clear this Home of patients, by the laying on of hands."

Nurse Baker shook him off, and turned away with a giggle.

"First it's love, and then it's prayers," she said. "I can't make you out at all."

She warned her fellow nurses to beware of Mr. Dyer's friend, "the old fellow who talks gibberish," but nevertheless she entered the address on his card in her diary.

"Despite his pious conversation, he hasn't the ways of a saint," she thought, remembering certain words and actions of a conflicting kind. "I daresay he'd be good for a dinner and theatre some night. Americans are very free handed, and there seems no lack of money in that quarter."

Meanwhile Sidney entered the sick room, and seated himself by Ezra's bed, where the scent of Thora's lilac reached his nostrils.

"The white flowers of death," he told himself. "The white flowers of death!"



CHAPTER XII

"DEATH TO THE HEATHEN"

NURSE BAKER had arranged her patient's pillows comfortably for the night, and still she lingered in the room. As she performed various small offices, her eyes constantly met those of Sidney Sharp. The silent communication of stolen glances gave her a sense of pleasurable excitement.

At last he made a sign to her that he wished for a word outside. She beckoned him to follow, as she slipped through the door in her felt slippers, so noiselessly that Ezra did not know she had left the room.

"I'm afraid you won't have a very comfortable night, Mr. Sharp," she said. "It really is quite unnecessary to sit up."

"So you think, but allow me to venture an opposite opinion. I have been with my poor friend now for some time, and have made a point of never, if possible, leaving him alone. He has had several severe convulsions, at various intervals, generally after some mental excitement. He was intensely agitated, in a pleasurable manner, of course, at seeing Miss Sutton. His colour came and went like a girl's, and his passionate attach-

ment to her naturally created a great sensation of unrest, a yearning desire for the unattainable. He might very likely have a seizure after the emotional upheaval of that young lady's embraces. I assure you, Nurse Baker, their tender parting made my heart yearn for a sympathetic companion."

He patted her hand as he spoke, and drew nearer to her.

"Oh! come," she said, "isn't this rather nonsense? You are here to look after your friend, not to make a fuss with his nurse. Flirting on duty isn't allowed."

"But what of flirting after duty hours? You must tell me about that another time."

"I'll see."

"If I ring in the night, will you come at once? I am not easy about Mr. Dyer. I don't quite like the colour of his lips. After one of his attacks some few weeks ago, he looked horrible, almost—almost as if he had been suffocated. I thought I should never get him round."

"Oh! you've only to touch the bell, and I shall be there," she replied, with a reassuring smile. "Make yourself as comfortable as you can in the big arm chair by the fire, and sleep without fear. I'll guarantee nothing will happen to alarm you."

"If I sleep," replied the man, "it will not be until this human frame, and these eyes of clay are exhausted with watching and prayer. I intend to pour out my whole

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soul in supplication, and, then, my sister, I know the Spirit will descend upon me in so powerful a manner that every foreboding of ill will be removed entirely. I shall hear an angel voice saying over Brother Dyer : ' Not one hair of his head shall be harmed.' May I salute you, dear sister, and give you my blessing for the night ? "

Nurse Baker dodged the Saint's salute, and flitted away down the corridor, suppressing her laughter as she went.

Sidney Sharp returned to the silent chamber, closing and locking the door. He moved towards Ezra on tip toe.

" I'm not asleep," murmured the weary voice. " Talk to me, Sidney. I feel in a waking dream. Tell me it is real. Thora has been here, tell me the good news over and over again."

" No, you have heard talk enough, Nurse Baker says. You must rest in the Lord, and be still," replied the low voice of the watcher. " I am here to assist you in your afflictions, should any spasm of illness disturb your peace. Ah ! Brother, you must needs be a fit subject for my prayers, seeing that at one time it was your wont to carry the glad tidings of the blest to far lands. There your voice was heard like a roaring lion, and, by hearkening to you, many sheaves were brought to Zion. Now your great work has ceased. Instead, the sweet love of woman possesses your bosom."

"Ah! and it is sweet," sighed Ezra. "Did you notice the bloom on her cheek, the white of her neck, and the strange light in her eyes, like stars beckoning the soul to Heaven? Do you blame me?"

Ezra waited anxiously for the answer, with parted lips, and searching eyes.

"No, Brother. It is a weakness of the flesh, and if you are contented that this woman should make your heart rejoice, who am I to pass judgment on such a pleasing madness? Remember, I shall be dozing by the fire, and you have only to call me ever so faintly, and I will respond with Godly consolations."

"Good night," said Ezra. "You are very good."

He smiled as he spoke, and sleep cast a shadow over surrounding objects. He was drifting to a world of peace, to visions of gladness, to welcome rest.

"Good night," responded Sidney, "may archangels and seraphims surround you."

His voice held a ringing note; he spoke with exaltation, as he moved to his chair, and sat rigidly staring at the slumbering form on the bed. Presently he looked down on his wrist and fingers, with an expression of joy, as he realised they were prepared for work.

"To-night," he thought, "to-night, Ezra Dyer, this hand must kill you. Glad, fortunate, thrice blessed, lucky hand, to be

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chosen for the deed. Hasten slow moments, hasten the time appointed for my glorious victory. To kill the faithless Elder, and crush him like a fly from life, to rob this transgressor of breath, this worm who has crawled through mud from the paths of virtue, and outraged the sacred name of Mormon. For such a service, surely you were fashioned from the beginning."

Sidney dwelt upon the days of his early suspicions, when first he whispered to the Fathers of the Church that Elder Dyer was a wolf in disguise. How gladly they had set upon the shoulders of his kinsman this task of spy. He knew he was singularly fitted for the part his religion bade him play. The taste of blood was upon him.

"Hypocrites and untrue, seceders, traitors, liars, must be caught with their own tools," said these men of wisdom. "The work is sealed to you, Brother Sharp, since by Heaven's revelation you have been shown your cousin's perfidy. Let him escape unmolested from Utah, that we may be fully assured of his intention before striking the blow. We send you as our emissary to guard our honour, to work for the faith, and wipe out the insult to Mormonism."

Sidney re-called the words with a quickening of his pulses, as he realised the hour had come to fulfil his promise. He rose to his feet, eager, impulsive, ready for the fray. Clapped in his arm he held a large cushion

which Nurse Baker had provided for his vigil in the arm chair.

"It is from my own room," she had told him, when he asked for an extra pillow. "Only too happy to spare it for you, Mr. Sharp."

He stole to the bedside. His brain was overwrought with frenzied imagination, and he fancied, as he paused, that the inhabitants of Hades sounded a funeral knell to the fallen Saint. He joined in the chorus from the depths of his spirit, and trembled for very joy.

Ezra stirred, at the same moment opening his eyes, and turning them on Sidney. Such trusting eyes, heavy with sleep, that even the murderer saw something of pathos in their confiding gaze.

"What are you doing?" Ezra asked drowsily.

"Bringing you another pillow for your head, Brother, but I perceive you are sufficiently comfortable, so will forego the sacrifice of my own ease."

The words were accompanied by a sigh, and a slight shuffling of impatient feet.

"And you have only a chair in which to rest! How like you to forget yourself. I am quite happy, happier than I deserve to be. Don't let thoughts of me trouble you, Brother. All is well—is well."

As Ezra spoke, he saw the spray of lilac Thora had left beside him, and clasped it

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in his hand. Sidney watched the pale lips press the crushed blossoms passionately.

"I shall sleep better, if you sleep, Sidney. Good night, again, and God be with you. Life is very sweet. Say, at least, 'Amen' to that."

"So be it," replied the soothing voice. "I, too, am heavy lidded and weary, but in the morning life will be sweeter, at least to me."

Returning to his chair, the would-be murderer made a sound of heavy breathing, broken now and again by an occasional snore. Soon, Ezra's breathing matched his own, and once more Sidney Sharp rose up, and moved swiftly to his cousin's side. This time he darted forward with the rapidity and silence of a snake. No pausing now. He dared not risk delay. The anticipated moment had been too long postponed. He thrilled with a sense of loyalty to his Church, telling himself that from the first he had done well and acted with discretion. He knew that no traces of the subtle poison, which in earlier days started Ezra's sickness, could be found in the body, and all was still in the house, all was ready and complete. The victim lay sleeping, while his murderer was terribly—actively—awake.

With a curse muttered under his breath, Sidney flung the heavy cushion upon the sleeper's face, precipitating the whole weight of his own muscular frame upon the mouth

of the smothered man. He felt a writhing under the folds, the soul fighting for life, while the destroying angel (for thus Sidney Sharp designated himself) gave his victim no loophole for escape. He was strong in body, as in mind. He knew his nerves were of iron, that he desired this man's death more than he had ever desired the riches of the world. To kill a faithless Mormon was an action so great and holy, that he mounted in imagination the golden steps to the very throne of God.

"Death to the heathen!" he hissed. "I, the prophet of Jehovah, the preacher of righteousness, the disciple of the Book of Mormon, bid you die like a dog. Down! down! down! to the pit you have prepared for yourself."

His eyes were alight with fanatical fire, his whole face grew contorted with the lust of blood and the fury of revenge.

"Oh, God!" he called silently, "witness my deed. Bless me for what I do. Give me a crown of glory, since I have conquered and smitten this miserable sinner."

He glowed from head to foot with satisfaction. He could hardly resist his longing to laugh aloud, and struggled to suppress a yell of hideous triumph, as he thought of the passing soul.

All movement ceased beneath the pillow, —the martyred man lay still. Surely by now his soul had sped through the veiled window

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to the outer snows, and away like a white winged bird to the habitation of disembodied spirits. The air in the room felt pure and sweet, the scent of the lilac was there.

Sidney Sharp still muttered execrations under his breath.

"Our sect, oh, brother of iniquity, hath, by my hand, delivered you over to the buffetings of Satan, in the name of the Lord. Thus thou art cut off and cast into the caves of fire, to suffer everlastingly with unbelievers and the enemies of the Prophet's Church."

He fancied he heard a great cry of all the Mormons scattered over the earth: "Amen, amen!"

He felt no bond of sin upon his conscience, as he raised the cushion, and looked upon the dead face of Ezra Dyer. Its awful whiteness brought a warm flood of realisation to Sidney Sharp. He had completed his work.

"Harm cannot come to me," he told himself. "The Church is a purifier, and will refine its members as silver. I am the servant of the Lord, and shall be praised and rewarded for well doing."

He looked down on the ghastly features of the slain, smiling upon and touching them, to satisfy himself they were growing cold.

"The workers of evil shall be cut off," he said. "When one member is polluted the whole body must suffer from contagion."

No chance of salvation without the amputation of the festering limb. Oh, Brother! thy memory remaineth accursed for all time. The bitter imprecations of the righteous fall about thy head, for thou didst wound in the house of friends, and, by example, shake the faith of babes in Christ. We, therefore, cast you out as refuse. Your authority has perished like stubble before a devouring flame. Your portion shall be among the unbelievers and hypocrites."

These words were so pleasant to Sidney's ears, he would have liked to repeat them as he replaced the pillow in the chair, pummelling it into shape, but he dared not lose time. A few petals of dead lilac fell on his hand as silent witnesses. He shook them over the fire, which still burned brightly.

Stealthily unlocking the door, he glanced again at the figure on the bed, seeing nothing to displease him, and again pride swelled within his heart. He was sure, too, that, as an actor, he could also triumph, and prepared to quickly contort his face to one of agonised suffering, at the same time pressing the electric bell. As he heard Nurse Baker's approaching steps, he rushed out to meet her, his trembling fingers waving in the air, his voice broken by well feigned sobs.

"Nurse Baker!" he gasped, "Oh! Nurse Baker! he has had a stroke, and, God help me, I—I was asleep."

She ran in, and bent over the dead man.

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"Your friend is past all human aid," she said. "He seems to have had a hard fight for life."

At her words, the listener stiffened, stared, and shivering drew nearer.

"Not dead! not really dead!" moaned Sidney, flinging himself at the foot of the corpse in an abandonment of grief. "I won't believe it; he can be restored. It's only a fit, do something. Chafe his hands, bring brandy, and hot water bottles for his feet. I awoke suddenly, I thought of him even in my sleep, and went to his side to see if all were well. I fancied I must be dreaming. Ezra, my more than brother, come back, come back!"

Nurse Baker was feeling where the heart and pulse once beat.

"Calm yourself," she said severely. "I tell you he is dead. Human power can do nothing. I will call the matron, who will send for a doctor."

Sidney leaped to his feet. He now felt thoroughly worked up to his *rôle* of mourner and hypocrite.

"Oh, you lie!" he cried, wringing his hands. "My brother lives! my brother lives! He has only fainted."

He ran up and down the room as one distraught. His sobbing could be heard across the corridor, as he secretly congratulated himself on the piercing sound of his cries, and the reality of his tears.

"For mercy's sake be quiet. You will wake the other patients," cried Nurse Baker, darting through the door to summon help, followed by Sidney Sharp, who, still keeping up his part of demented mourner, shouted loudly that she must bring his kinsman back to life,—she must restore to his bosom the man he loved.

Other attendants appeared quickly on the scene, while Nurse Baker whispered that the patient in 33 bed had died suddenly, and Mr. Sharp was beside himself with grief, fear, and shock.

"A fit," she said. "He had one before, Mr. Sharp told me. How can we quiet this hysterical man?"

The matron spoke to the weeping Sidney in stern tones, shaking him by the shoulder with a none too friendly hand.

"For goodness sake, pull yourself together, and consider the other sick people in the house. It's disgraceful to behave like this. Nurse Baker, conduct Mr. Sharp downstairs to the visitors' waiting-room, he won't be heard there, and try to persuade him to listen to reason. If he refuses, turn him out into the street."

Still sobbing intermittently, he suffered himself to be led away, holding Nurse Baker's hand, which he fondled between his own.

"I loved him so! I loved him so!" he moaned. "Don't think me weak. I'm a strong man as a rule. How shall I live

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without my brother in Christ? Tell me that, if you would help me?"

"You believe in God, can't you seek consolation from Him?" said Nurse Baker.

"Ah! my dear sister, you have the spirit of faith, and the voice of inspiration. Heaven bless you for those words. I seem to hear a divine messenger saying:—'My son, peace be unto thy soul; thy afflictions shall be but for a moment.' The voice of the Creator shall give me courage."

He stretched himself upon a sofa to which she led him, and waved her away.

"Leave me alone awhile, that I may regain my self-control," he said. "Perchance angels will come and minister to me."

Nurse Baker stole away, glancing back at the limp figure with pitying eyes.

"Poor creature!" she thought. "He is highly strung, but very interesting. I am glad I was able to comfort him. He has a rock of faith to which he can cling, and he will feel happier soon."

She wondered how it felt to be religious, and to believe in angels. She even wondered if they would appear, and whisper sweet messages to Sidney Sharp.



CHAPTER XIII

A MASK OF CLAY

THORA awoke at dawn, how could she sleep with such an untold weight of joy upon her soul? She wanted just to lie and contemplate, hour by hour, the full bliss of her lot. Outside, the snow wrapped the city in a shroud, but Thora found it hard to realise there were aching hearts beneath those white roofs. For once, the tragedy of life was all in shadow for her, and this London, which had been the scene of so much personal suffering, was suddenly transformed to a fairy land of romance.

Her mind travelled to spring's gladness, when hardy open air lilacs should rock in the wind, expanding purple and white blossoms beneath May suns. She must take Ezra some flowers as she had promised. It was comforting to remember his cousin's words:—"In the morning, all will be well," with the assurance that Ezra had such marvellous recuperative powers.

She sang to herself as she dressed. The little maid, sweeping the passage, paused to listen, with her ear to the keyhole.

"Doesn't seem to be taking the master's marriage much to heart after all, though

she wouldn't attend the service. Maybe, she's found a young man for herself," thought the sweeper wisely.

Her supposition was confirmed, as she noted the radiant glow on Miss Sutton's face, when she came with elastic tread from her room, and asked for breakfast quickly, as she was going out.

The carriage awaited her as on the previous night; already it seemed a familiar object, so soon does the mind grow accustomed to advantageous changes.

"Stop at a florist's in Regent Street," said Thora.

Men were sweeping and scraping the roads. The horses trotted at a brisk pace, no longer troubled by last night's snows.

"If it is too early to see him," she thought, "I can just inquire, and leave my flowers, they will carry their own message."

Thora purchased some bunches of lilies and Neapolitan violets, and with her hands full of the sweet scented blossoms, stood, in breathless expectation, upon the doorstep of the Home.

"How is Mr. Dyer?" she asked the man servant. "Can I see him?"

"Will you step this way, please, Miss, the matron wishes to speak to you in her room."

"He is no worse, I hope?"

Something in the man's manner pre-saged bad news. She noticed he strode ahead, not replying to her remark.

Her heart beat violently. Possibly the doctors had decided upon an immediate operation, and persuaded Ezra to submit. A weight of fear fell on the young shoulders. Bracing up her courage, she held herself erect, and smiled as she entered the room of dread.

"Good morning," she said, brightly. "I hope you can give me a satisfactory report."

The words had scarcely passed her lips, before she read in the matron's face that shadow of ill to come, conveyed by manner and expression even more quickly than speech.

"You—you have something to tell me which is bad, very bad?" she gasped.

Her smile faded, the tremulous lips stammered the question, as the matron advanced with outstretched hand. She was a woman of commanding presence, dark, pale, and usually impassive. To-day, her eyes were lighted by pity, her manner conveyed the sympathy she felt for this young girl, whose lover lay dead upstairs.

"I am sorry to say I have very serious news to break. Mr. Dyer passed peacefully away in his sleep last night."

Why speak of the awful convulsions in which the patient had apparently died?

His features were calm and composed now, his promised wife would never know.

The lilies dropped from Thora's hands, and the violets lay scattered on the ground. Her head fell forward on her clenched fists, she stood bent as one caught in a spasm of pain.

The matron stretched out a supporting arm, but found her stiff and cold, like a body frozen in a storm.

"You must try and feel it is for the best, he might have been a sufferer for life."

Thora looked up suddenly, with eyes that blazed in a strange, uncanny manner.

"Why did he die? How did it happen?"

The words sounded strangled.

"God knows best why good lives are taken. The sudden heart failure must have occurred without a moment's warning. His friend was in the room."

"And was his friend awake, watching, as he promised?"

The question came fiercely.

"His friend, unfortunately, was asleep."

"Then how do you know it was peaceful at the last?"

Her voice shook with low, dry sobs. The tearless eyes glowed still like coals of flame.

"We have means of knowing. How I wish I could offer you some consolation. Is there nothing I can do for you?"

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Thora, who had allowed herself to be guided to a chair, sprang up, and clasping her hands, answered immediately :

"Let me see him. Let me go into the room alone. I want no one with me."

"But can you bear it? You are unnerved, and stunned. The sight of his face may open the flood gates of your grief, when this present self-control might vanish. Remember that in this house there are other sufferers. Last night they were aroused by a most injudicious show of sorrow on the part of Mr. Sharp. Such scenes cannot be repeated. Don't think me hard, only consider if you can trust yourself."

"Where is Mr. Sharp now?"

"At the Langham Hotel. He was most terribly upset, almost out of his mind."

Thora moved to the door.

"I must go up," she said. "I can bear it in silence. Nothing makes any difference now, only I want to see him."

"I will send Nurse Baker with you. Perhaps you would like a word with her. She was the last to attend on him."

The matron touched a bell, and gathered up the flowers, which she placed in Thora's hand.

"They were for Ezra," whispered the girl brokenly. "He shall have them still."

Nurse Baker came with a face of set gravity.

"Take Miss Sutton to No. 33."

Nurse Baker put her arm through Thora's.

"It must be very bitter," she whispered, as they mounted the stairs together. "I am so sorry for you."

"Thank you," in faltering reply, "but it's more than bitter, it's final—the last blow. One can bear things up to a point, then it all ends, and one is numb."

"But you are young to talk like that."

"I have suffered more than the old. The world has been so cruel, that it has, at last, crushed out all life and feeling. I am dead, too, nurse, quite dead, though I move and speak. Pray that you may never die in life, it is a worse wrench than giving up the spirit."

She appeared to be speaking truly. All the natural colour had flown from her lips and cheeks, her tearless eyes wore a glazed look, she seemed to have stiffened in every muscle. Her voice sounded metallic. She governed it now without faltering, yet its tone was unreal. Nurse Baker watched her critically, and paused on the stairs.

"If you take it that way you will have a nervous collapse," she said.

Thora shook her head.

"Oh, no, I had that once before, it was different then. I hadn't been frozen into submission. I saw my mother die in a fit of raving madness, and I was young, I could not bear the strain. I was given the

whole world yesterday, and to-day I am left destitute and barren. My lover has taken my all. I am dead too."

Nurse Baker shuddered. She felt as if she were walking with a corpse, which yet had power to speak and move. Perhaps it was as well this stricken girl should feel paralysed for the time. At least they were saved a scene, and for this advantage the matter-of-fact woman felt sincerely grateful.

She turned the key of the door, and was about to precede Thora into the darkened room, when she felt herself pulled back.

"No, I don't want any one here. Please leave me quite alone."

The nurse hesitated.

"Oh! you need not be afraid, your matron warned me there were others to consider. I claim, as my privilege, some few moments with all that is left of the man I loved, and who was ready to lay down his life for me. I shall make no sound, I couldn't cry. Don't you know there is a grief which longs in vain for the relief of tears, a grief above and beyond the usual signs? Look, I can speak to you calmly on the very threshold of his room."

The dignity of that solemn figure, still as a statue, and white as a lily, had its effect upon Nurse Baker. She was as far from understanding Thora at that moment, as Mr. Sutton had been for all the past years, but she felt the power and the mystery of a

mind poised on a higher plane than her own. It wielded the desired influence. She placed the key in Thora's hand, and stepped back, standing, with reverently bent head, to let the girl pass.

For a moment the shadowy chamber swam before the eyes of its lonely visitant, as Thora closed the door, leaning against the panel to compose her dazed thoughts and clouded vision.

Gradually the scene unfolded before her: ordinary objects of furniture, windows with drawn blinds, and the bed—upon which lay the outline of a still form under a sheet.

"He lies there."

She breathed the words aloud, startled by the sound of her own whisper. Every pulse beat fiercely, then she fancied she miraculously escaped from the burden of her flesh. She glided across the room, hardly aware that her limbs moved. She was all brain, without the consciousness of bodily feeling. She had no fear, no dread, only a sense of relief and anticipation.

Laying a trembling hand on the cover of the winding linen which hid him from her view, she folded it back tenderly. Face to face, the living and the dead, were wrapped in mysterious communion.

As Thora viewed him lying there in his last long sleep, her heart warmed suddenly. The handsome features she had pictured so often in dreams, were beautified by death

to an exquisite grandeur. The dark gipsy type, with sweeping eye lashes and coal black hair, made a striking contrast to the marble pallor of his skin. He was greater now in the silence, than when his oratory first stirred her to admiration, greater even than when he told her of his love, and folded her to his heart. Before she loved him as a man—now she worshipped his mask of clay, as if it were the likeness of a god.

"Ezra," she whispered, bending nearer to him with clasped hands, "what can I do for you now? The world thinks you are beyond my reach—can I not serve you still?"

"Under the ban!"

She saw that inscription, written with the eye of imagination, over his forehead. Why had he died? She asked the question before, only to be told by the matron that a sudden heart failure was the cause of death. Such an easy answer to give!

"It isn't enough for me," she said, "since he was—under the ban." The words broke from her lips with painful intensity, she could hardly recognise the voice as her own. "Ezra," she sighed, "if there has been treachery, if any human hand has risen against you, Ezra, my Ezra, I will live to avenge you, though I am only a woman. I swear by the living God, should I lose my own soul, I will deal back blow for blow, and track down the enemies who

have worked for your destruction. Yesterday I was truly woman, weak, yielding, loving; to-day, I am iron, and ready to pay in full a debt of blood."

She could almost fancy his face moved. She gasped for breath, as she whispered the fierce vow.

"I wonder if you hear me! Only a few hours ago your lips were so warm on mine, the glow of your life woke in me the knowledge of what life may be, to those whose hearts are not eternally widowed in youth. I should have been your bride, with the right to rest at your side, to share your existence day and night, to awake and find your dear head close to mine, to sleep upon your breast."

A sob shook her. The pent up tears rushed unexpectedly to burning eyelids, sending a dull, throbbing of agonised woe from brain and temples, to every nerve in her physical being. Desire for contact seized her, surrounding objects faded, only his face shone through the darkness with alluring beauty.

"They shan't rob me of it," she whispered wildly. "You are mine, Ezra, death has made me your wife, your own."

In a frenzy of sorrow, she flung herself upon the bed, and drew the sheet over their two forms, burying her face against his shoulder. Thus she lay, stifling her sobbing on the icy bosom of her lover, oddly soothed by the knowledge that she shared his shroud.

A sensation of numbed exhaustion crept over her faculties, she felt herself drifting away, away in a dream of love's realisation, she closed her eyes. A heavy cloud seemed falling upon her, she was wandering across mountains and eternal snows.

* * * *

"I think we ought to go in."

It was Nurse Baker speaking outside the door to one of her colleagues.

"How long has Miss Sutton been there?"

"Oh! quite a while. She begged to be left alone, but it isn't right for a young person in her highly strung condition to remain with the dead all this time. Perhaps she has fainted. You might come with me, in case she gives trouble."

The two entered and glanced round. No sign of Thora. Suddenly Nurse Baker pointed to the figures on the bed.

"Look," she gasped, in a voice that shook with horror.

She ran forward, thinking the girl had killed herself, and threw back the covering.

"Asleep!" she gasped. "Can it be possible?"

The nurses lifted her up, and carried her out. It was not till they were in the corridor that Thora opened her eyes.

"You've taken me away," she said, remembering. "How cruel!"

"And high time too," replied Nurse Baker, shocked beyond measure at what she afterwards described as an act of madness. "I should have stayed with you. I ought to have known you were not responsible."

The girl made no answer. Without a word she rose and went downstairs, entering the carriage like one in a trance, feeling her way as if in darkness.

"To the Langham Hotel," she said, speaking with effort. The words were so faint, they only just caught the groom's ear. He stared at her with puzzled eyes, as he closed the door.

"There's something wrong," he whispered, and the coachman nodded assent. He, too, had seen Thora's face, for the moment hardly recognising in her the smiling girl who had arrived at the Home, with violets and lilies in her hand.



CHAPTER XIV

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF JOSEPH SMITH.

NURSE BAKER was walking briskly in the Park, by the frozen Serpentine. Either the keen air of the winter's day, or the remarks of her companion, had brought to her cheeks a brilliant flush.

"You've such a tongue, you'd talk anyone over to your own way of thinking," she said, pausing, and letting her eyes travel across the expanse of ice, with an expression of fearful wonder.

The man at her side drew closer, and placed his arm through hers.

"Dear little Kate," he murmured, "can you doubt my love? Would I, as the holy prophet of the Lord, speak false words to one of His handmaidens? Could a man pledged to establish the kingdom of God on earth, and give judgment unto the Saints, expound a creed unfavourable to the eternal purposes of the Great Jehovah?"

"It's just as I said, you speak so fair, Mr. Sharp, that I can't help listening."

"You are an orphan," he continued, "working for your living. Any day, through ill health, that source of income may be taken

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from you. I offer you a beautiful home in a fair country, and the devotion of a true, loving husband. I merely ask in return that you (who at present appear to have no particular beliefs), will adopt, as a matter of form, our Mormon religion. In time, the form may possibly change to deep abiding faith."

"Miss Sutton, I understand, refused to become a Mormon for the sake of her lover," murmured Nurse Baker, hesitatingly.

"You must not take her as a pattern. I shall never forget the visit she paid me the morning after my dear Ezra's death. She came to the Langham Hotel like one demented. So selfishly absorbed was she in her own sorrow, she could feel no pity for my distress. I am told her mother died mad, and really, at times I fear she is not responsible for her actions."

"Certainly, on the day you name, her behaviour was that of an insane person. I fear she blames you for falling asleep, or else has a vague suspicion you were not really very devoted to your cousin."

Nurse Baker made the confession as if she feared her words might seriously hurt his feelings.

"Ah! poor child, it is natural. Being herself among the heathen, she fails to grasp that a man of God cannot be animated by a spirit of revenge, even to one who outrages his sacred calling. I only looked

in sorrow on my fallen brother, knowing that vengeance from above must inevitably consume him. Do you know that Ezra Dyer was at one time an Apostle? He helped to preside over the affairs of the Church, and held the keys of power, to seal on earth that which shall be sealed in heaven."

A look of strange mysticism crept into the man's eyes as he spoke.

"I don't understand," said Kate, regarding him with a sensation of discomfort.

"Ah! well, perhaps I am talking above your head. In time all will be made clear, and your eyes will be opened to discern the sacred mysteries. I, too, am a pillar of faith upon which the Mormons may lean securely, working to build the kingdom which our Prophet Joseph laid. Nothing can now destroy our perfect organisation, arranged so harmoniously, that it must stand, if but one Elder were left living on the earth. Our teachings roll forth through all the world."

He drew himself up, and pride was written in every line of his face.

"Yet here in England, I have heard many discreditable rumours about the 'Saints,' as you call yourselves," Nurse Baker protested.

"Then your informants are liars, and will meet the fate of such, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. Slandrous speech, calculated to injure the sect, merely



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proves that the minds of the heathen are enveloped in darkness. I fear, as yet, you are not sufficiently advanced for me to expound the divine authority of the Book of Mormon, and its miraculous translation by Joseph Smith. It will be sufficient for your salvation to be joined to me, a believing member. I will take you from a people ignorant and blinded by the devil, to a city of light and joy, where you shall find a full cup of pleasure, flowing over. You shall see in Utah our Mormon temple, which reveals more wealth, art, splendour, science, and revelation, than any building in the world. I heard it once described by an Englishman as representing 'a child's idea of heaven.' Look at Miss Sutton, how well she has feathered her nest! She was merely engaged to one of our Elders, and behold she finds herself to-day a wealthy woman."

Nurse Baker was still unconvinced, and did not try to conceal the fact.

"But you said just now I must not take her as a pattern. Besides, I don't think Miss Sutton appreciates money. She would rather be a beggar, and see her lover alive, than possess his whole fortune, and know that he has gone from her for ever."

The woman spoke sympathetically. She guessed how it must feel to love.

"Be not deceived, sweet, unsuspecting Kate, by the tears of that young woman. I hear she is about to journey to Utah, at the

advice of her solicitor, to perform certain duties in connection with the large property she has inherited. Not contented with the possession of the goods that were his in England, she means to make sure of her domains at Salt Lake."

"Can you blame her, since they are hers by law?"

"Indeed, no. I have from the first upheld the proposition that she should come to the land of the Faithful. She has accepted my offer of escort, if I can provide a chaperone. I propose that you and I together should see her safely to that far country, you as my wife, and she as the heiress of one whose name was once loved, and is now, alas! hated, throughout the Mormon territory."

"Will she be in danger if she goes?"

A strange light leapt to Sidney's eyes, he smiled and shook his head.

"Not if she is under the protection of Ezra Dyer's cousin, an Elder of the Church. I am a man of power, remember, and it is written: 'the righteous shall shine,' though the folly of fools will perish with their bodies of corruption."

A sudden breeze cut the air like a knife, and set Nurse Baker shivering. She twisted her handsome fur stole tightly round her throat, and clasped her hands in the recesses of a muff, of which any Society woman might have been proud. This "man of

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God " knew well how to appeal to feminine weakness, and already many expensive gifts had found their way into Nurse Baker's keeping.

"Of course, I know," she said, "that the Mormon polygamy of past days has long since been banished by order of the Government, but I cannot understand how people, professing holiness, could ever have practised such a system."

Elder Sharp gave a little cough, evidently he, too, felt the icy blast.

"Let us walk," he said, taking her arm. "The subject to which you refer is one I recently discussed with Miss Sutton. English women, brought up in the modern school of thought, find it difficult to grasp the old sanctified methods justified by Scripture, and practised by the ancient patriarchs. We still maintain, though we do not publicly voice our theories, that the law of the United States, which denies a man's right to support more than one wife, is highly tyrannical. The Lord never reproved David for his many wives, and only think of Abraham and Jacob. I must admit that spiritual wifeage is a great blessing, and one specially designed for the Faithful. You make too much of your human body, which should be entirely given over to God, who has constantly on hand a multitude of little spirits, which He has ordained shall come and sojourn on the earth for a time. Human frames are temporary dwelling places

for these spirits, but conjugal intercourse is necessary to accomplish the Lord's work."

Nurse Baker burst out laughing.

"Good gracious, Mr. Sharp, you don't really believe that!"

"It has been revealed to me. These millions of little spirits, all wishing and waiting for mortal bodies, desire greatly to be of Mormon parentage. It is true that the servants of the Almighty who, in the past, married a multitude of wives, drew in their train those spirits which gave the greatest glory to the God of Israel. He would never send His choice spirits to the degraded people who restrict holy and virtuous men to the possession of one wife."

"You speak so feelingly, one would almost think the practice still continued," said Nurse Baker, pouting as she spoke.

"The heathenish statesmen," he continued, ignoring her remark, "who make laws for us, care nothing about our Church, so we are obliged to have, practically, a constitution and government of our own. How could we remain in bondage to the heathen? The only course open to us was to feign obedience, and manage our own affairs in secret. America knows well enough that we work against the Government; we are outlaws, dear Kate, but this same Government has to wink at the ways of the Mormons, because the Mormons are too strong. If our wives did not live

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in different houses, the Government would be down on us directly, but thank heaven, through mining, cattle grazing, and building, we have waxed so wealthy, we can afford luxurious separate establishments for each honoured wife, who is sealed to us in the name of the Lord. There is no such place in the world for a woman as Utah. There, we men make queens of them indeed. You would have your Paris dresses, and your jewels, your carriage to drive, your box at the theatre, your share in the social gaieties of a town which can be holy, and yet amuse itself. In the middle of a dance for instance, a horn will sound, and all the revellers kneel down and pray, showing that at no time is God forgotten. You see, I have made a clean breast of it all to you. We regard polygamy still as one of our chief blessings, and glory in the fact that the heathens have failed to destroy our independence."

A hard, unnatural expression set Nurse Baker's features in a mask-like repose. Unexpected lines appeared at the corners of her mouth, all that was girlish in her bearing seemed to fall from her. In those few moments she had become a calculating woman of the world, hovering on the brink of contemplated sin. It struck her like the blow of a sharp knife, and seemed to wound the most sacred recesses of her heart.

"Well, I'm glad you've told me," she

said. "At least you are honest, and I thank you for speaking so straightly. I, too, will be honest in return. If, as you suggest, I adopted your faith, it would be merely as a matter of form, to enable me to accompany you to your country as a so-called 'wife.' I cannot deny that the religion of which you are so proud seems to me to have sprung from the devil, who is always supposed to give his followers a good time just at first, before he hands in his bill. Now I am just thinking, whether I believe sufficiently in his Satanic Majesty, to fear the day of reckoning. You see, my parents were Atheists, and I was brought up without God in my life."

A note of tragedy shook her voice. It was as if her soul caught some glimmering of what she might have been under more favourable circumstances. She gazed at the grey sky, remembering it could be bright and blue.

"You speak wildly, dear Kate. Your words are surely ill chosen when contemplating matrimony with one who is spiritual enough to have divine dreams, and to be the companion of angels. We Elders, who follow in the footsteps of Joseph Smith, the chosen medium to convey a new Gospel to the world, the inspired of heaven, wear his robe of sanctity, and if we bring up families in the fear of God, and the faith of Mormon, we shall live and reign with Christ a thousand years."

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Nurse Baker hardly listened, she was thinking seriously if the game were worth the candle. Was she brave enough to step out of her groove, to snatch at fortune, to barter for gold a woman's greatest possession ?

"I must go back now," she said. "I will write to you."

Her words were hurried ; she moved away with averted eyes.

"Are you tired, my dear ?"

"Yes, a little."

"Then get into the motor, and I'll take you home."

He signed to an electric brougham, which stood at a short distance under the leafless trees.

"Let me first drive you to some good shop where we can purchase an evening wrap. As it is your night off, I want to take you to dine at the Carlton. You shall have a rest first, and I will fetch you later."

Nurse Baker smiled. The sky looked less leaden, life grew suddenly rosier.

"That will be grand," she said, enthusiastically.

She leaned back in the luxurious little carriage, fully realising that this was her first opportunity of enjoying luxuries. He asked her to go to a land where men made queens of their wives, he offered her the tempting bait of wealth, and painted the future in alluring colours. Certain sporting instincts in Nurse Baker rose to the surface.

"I shall live among a people who would not despise me for what I did, since it is allowed by their religion," she thought, "while here, in England, there are not enough men to go round."

Sidney took her hand, and held it fast. She did not draw it away, though the pressure of his fingers hurt her.

"Thus I shall hold you always," he whispered, "in love's fast sweet grip, if you will let me live for your happiness, if you will take me as your husband."

She sighed softly, for the passion in his voice appealed to some responsive note which hitherto had remained mute.

"I'm so tired of nursing sick people," she said. "I do long for a change."

He took the murmured words as consent, and kissed her on the lips with a fiery warmth.

"You dear, tender, quiet soul," he whispered, mistaking her momentary emotion for genuine affection. "Isaiah says, 'when the Book is revealed, the meek shall increase their joy in the Lord.'"

"The book of life," she said, "interests me at present more than the Book of Mormon."

He kissed her again.

"I will make you live," he murmured, "as you have never lived before, and God grant you may be the means of bringing many unbelieving sisters to join the ranks of the Saints."

CHAPTER XV

UNDERSTOOD

THORA was busy at a desk in her private sitting-room at one of the big London hotels. She had a pile of letters and a number of legal papers beside her, which she sorted with care.

A note that had just arrived lay unopened. She turned to it with a sad little smile.

"Muriel's writing," she said. "It seems I am always in her mind. I wonder if she thinks me ungrateful. There was a time when she could help me, now no one can be of any use. I am afraid she knows my present sorrow is beyond friends, too deep for words, too bitter to outgrow. I stand apart in awful loneliness, waiting—waiting—for something greater than consolation."

The words sent a shiver through the girlish frame, and those enigmatical eyes which, in the past, had often puzzled people, now gave Thora's face an unearthly expression. Her figure had become so slim, she looked spirit-like in her black gown, and, oddly enough, pain increased her beauty by

endowing her whole personality with a mysterious elusiveness.

"Dearest Thora," wrote Muriel Barcroft. "I know you don't like going about just at present, but if you could possibly brace yourself up to have tea with me and one other friend this afternoon, I do not think you will regret the effort. I have met a Mr. Kelly, who knows a good deal of the Mormons, and he is very anxious to join his persuasions to mine, in trying to induce you to give up your proposed journey to Utah. I cannot tell you all my horrible fears, but really they are not exaggerated or unreasonable. Mr. Kelly assures me visitors to the Mormon territory are watched by spies night and day, and that you will be especially marked down as a person who has influenced a Mormon Elder to desert the Church. He considers it would be most unsafe for you to go, as people there have a strange way of disappearing, and he believes your enemies might be capable of any abominable crime. The great horror of Mormonism lies in the fact, that its votaries pretend they receive divine sanction to commit sins. Every abominable action is prefaced with: 'Thus saith the Lord.' According to their creed, 'He prospers them in assassination, licentiousness, and even torture.' It is their policy to suppress all information of their doings, and, to attain this end, they fall back on the old phrase

that 'dead men tell no tales.' May they not add: 'Dead women are also silent?' You will doubtless find them to be pious, hospitable, kindly men to outward appearances, but beware of their 'secret revelations,' for at some of their private meetings, the Elders have thought out penalties worthy of the Inquisition of old Spain. They exult and glory in such deeds. Mr. Kelly feels sure if poor Ezra had recovered, he would still have been doomed, since Mormonism has its emissaries in every State. At the bidding of the Church, their spies would have discovered his hiding-place; he could have found no way to be saved. It is a nightmare to me to think you might be shut up in Utah among those revengeful people, far from helping hands. Mormon 'Saints' may smile upon you with murderous designs in their hearts. They will lay Ezra's desertion at your door.

"Your anxious and always affectionate
MURIEL."

Thora read the letter slowly; there were no signs of flinching in her set face, as she thought out the matter.

She knew this stranger could tell her nothing fresh. She was not going forth in ignorance. Ezra had prepared her for every pitfall. Nevertheless, she sent word she would come, at the hour appointed, to meet Mr. Kelly.

Other letters lay unopened. Recently

acquired wealth made her the recipient of many begging requests.

"From father," she said, drawing a flimsy sheet of paper from its covering, on which a characterless hand had formed thin letters :—

"MY DEAREST THORA,

"I must indeed thank you most warmly, both on behalf of myself and my wife, for your generosity in sending us such a handsome cheque. Judiciously invested, it will make a great difference to our income. I must say I feel a little uncomfortable at accepting money, left you by a man of whom I so thoroughly disapproved, but I am thankful to know before his death he broke his connection with infidel Mormonism, which rejects the divinity of the Bible, and preaches the loathsome dogmas of infidelity. Addie and I are very comfortable at the flat, and shall be even more so now, with the addition you have made to our finances. In justice to myself, I wish to say, it was at the persuasion of Addie and her mother that I abandoned my first idea of returning the substantial sum you sent with such tactful and, I may add, affectionate words. I note you are shortly leaving England. I presume you will travel on the Continent, being well able to afford a chaperone, who, I expect, will be a lady of good position. A change will do you good, for I note you are still feeling broken down by the sudden

death of Mr. Dyer. Cheer up, you have all your life before you, and the chance of now making a brilliant marriage.

"Your very grateful father,

"RALPH SUTTON."

Thora set her teeth, the last line jarred painfully upon her sensitive sorrow. She tore the letter across, and threw the pieces away among waste paper.

Another envelope waited to give up its budget of news.

"The last," she said, recognising Sidney Sharp's writing.

"DEAR MISS SUTTON,

"Even in your sorrow, I cannot but feel your kind woman's heart will rejoice to hear of a friend's happiness. Early yesterday morning Kate Baker, whom perhaps you will better remember as Nurse Baker at the Home in Devonshire Street, was sealed to me by the Holy Spirit of promise, or, in other words, is my wife by Mormon law. We propose that you should travel back with us to Salt Lake City. Kate will be proud to chaperone you. In future she will make her home in Utah, and I trust may love to live there, feeling that it would be blessed to eventually die and rise there, in the resurrection. I trust in time she will fully realise the beauties of our religion, and grasp the all-needed New Revelation contained in the Book of Mormon, with its gifts, powers, and mysteries. Once on my

native soil, I feel sure that Kate will consent to the secret initiatory rites, and lie happily in the lap of Mormonism. She begs to be kindly remembered to you, and will write you full details of our journey to Utah in a few days.

"Your sincere friend and well wisher,
"SIDNEY SHARP."

A feeling of repugnance crept over Thora. She could hardly bear to touch the sheet which he had fingered. She fancied she saw his hand, with the pointed nails, shaped like long claws. It sickened her to think that an English woman, the last who had smoothed Ezra's pillow on his dying night, should have given herself to the canting, hypocritical Elder. What would her fate be in years to come? Thora put the thought away. She longed to destroy the letter, but instead reserved it to show Muriel and Mr. Kelly. At any rate, the victimising of Nurse Baker proved a convenience, and made it possible for Thora to travel with Ezra's cousin, to the country Ezra had deserted. She telegraphed a few conventional words of congratulation, and drove at once to Mrs. Barcroft's house.

She found her alone with Howard Kelly, a man of middle age. Something in him reminded her of the vivacity which had made Ezra so attractive.

"We are old friends, Howard and I," said Mrs. Barcroft, "but, being a great

traveller, he wandered from the fold, and we had not met for five years. It was nice of you to come, Thora. I was dreadfully afraid you would refuse."

Mr. Kelly looked curiously at the striking figure in black. Muriel had told him the girl's history with perfect frankness, sketching her early surroundings, her love for the Mormon Elder, his desertion of the faith, and subsequent death which left Miss Sutton a woman of fortune.

"I must be fair, and warn you," said Thora, "that I have absolutely made up my mind to go to Salt Lake, and nothing you or your friend may say, will shake my resolution. Mr. Sharp has married an English woman, and she is to escort me. I am going on business. I have nothing to fear from the hands of the Mormons."

"Married to an English woman," cried Muriel. "Oh! my dear, do you think she knows that the wretches still practise polygamy in secret?"

"I can't say, but I shall not inform her now the deed is done. I feel very sorry for her. If she had come to me first, I would have told her all I know, but Sidney Sharp took care I should not meet her until after the marriage. You have been to Salt Lake," turning to Mr. Kelly with a widening of large mournful eyes, "what do you think of the place?"

"To me it is one of the most romantic

cities on the face of the earth. Some day I hope to return to it, for it certainly forms a study which is intensely interesting to the outsider. The unbroken power of the priesthood, their political ambition, and the fact that polygamy is still a living doctrine, in spite of all efforts to punish and prevent the practice, makes them a remarkable people. Their original leader, Joseph Smith, exerted a more powerful influence upon the destiny of his countrymen, than any historical American of the 19th century."

Howard Kelly spoke quickly, his voice was pleasantly modulated. He had the easy air of a man of the world, whose travels had enlarged an always sympathetic nature.

"I thought it might interest you to see this letter from Elder Sharp about his marriage," said Thora. "What does he mean by 'the secret initiatory rites?'"

Howard Kelly read it, and talked at the same time, his conversational powers being partly the outcome of a wandering life, and Irish descent.

"I met a woman some years ago who had escaped from the Mormons, and she told me some very extraordinary stories. She was taken to a temple and carried up several flights of stairs to the 'Hall of Initiation.' A circle of females, all strangers to her, performed a ceremony of disrobing, washing, and anointing her. After this, she was wrapped in a blanket, and the priestess

whispered a new name in her ear, which she was told never to divulge. A number of men and women went through no end of foolish mummary, one representing God, and another the devil, tempting Eve. They called the place 'The Garden of Eden.' They carried swords, and set a serpent loose. The men were dressed in white knickerbockers, with shirts and linen caps. The novice was made to perform several very meaningless ceremonies, like drawing her hand across her throat, as if with a knife. She had been previously warned that any resistance meant death. It may be an exaggeration, but I am merely repeating what she told me. Before her own clothes were restored, a last sign was given with the incantation : ' Marrow in the bones, strength in the sinews, and virtue in the loins throughout all generations.' The following day she was to be initiated into the deeper mysteries, and a curse invoked, which she was assured would undoubtedly fall, if she betrayed the holy rites to the heathen. She was so disgusted and alarmed, that she effected her escape that very night, disguised as a man. She also told me of a mysterious garment, called the ' Endowment Robe,' which is supposed to contain many virtues. It is merely a gown of common white shirting, with crosses and strips of scarlet worked in, emblematical of some of their secret temple rites."

"Poor Nurse Baker," sighed Thora. "I am afraid she will have a rude awakening. I've no doubt she is going out there expecting a good time."

"And she will get it, too, until her feminine jealousy is aroused by the fact that her husband is looking about for another bride. No Englishwoman could stand that. She will be taken to numerous social functions, very different from anything she has seen here. Music and dancing are the most popular entertainments. The invited guests generally contribute to the expenses, the sum they are expected to pay being printed on the invitation card. They have a large building called 'Social Hall,' which is used as a theatre, or a place for parties. The latter, like everything connected with these strange people, have their oddities."

He paused, as if re-calling himself.

"Oh, please go on," said Thora.

Howard Kelly shook his head.

"I don't want to shock you. The inner life of the Mormons, and even their public practices, are hardly subjects for drawing-room conversation. You must realise how this secret polygamy poisons everything, and absolutely destroys virtue. The new Mrs. Sharp will have to meet socially all sorts and conditions of people. She will know perhaps a dozen women, the mutual wives of one man, many of them divorced from previous husbands. Gradually she will

discover the unpleasant side of all their social and theatrical entertainments, which are turned into places of assignation. The room or hall is imperfectly lighted, for things are said and done there which would not stand a brighter illumination. One wonders what her fate will be among these shrewd men, with their large experience of human life. She cannot be a match for them in cunning, she will have to fall to the level of the other women."

"Oh! I don't mind what happens to Nurse Baker," burst in Muriel. "Perhaps it's rather horrid of me, but I can think of nothing but Thora, and the fact that she is going to that dreadful place."

"But not as the wife of a Mormon Elder," put in the girl quietly.

"No, thank God."

The words slipped out, and the moment they were spoken Muriel regretted them, for she saw a rush of tears moisten the lashes of Thora's lowered eyes.

"It amounts to this," murmured Muriel. "You are going to put yourself in the power of a set of assassins and robbers. Any business affairs would be far better transacted by a representative, in the form of a good lawyer, whom you could pay to go and look after your estates. I suspect that smooth faced Sidney Sharp of being a rank hypocrite. Possibly he has some ulterior

motive in marrying Nurse Baker, and offering you their chaperonage to Salt Lake."

Thora turned her large eyes on Mrs. Barcroft, with an expression she had never seen in them before.

"Don't you know," she said slowly, "that having work to do, and a mission in a far-off country, will be my salvation. If I stayed here inactive, I should die. I want to see the place I have pictured so often, the home of the man whose death has made me what I am—a woman with one idea, and one only."

She spoke intimately, forgetting Mr. Kelly's presence. Suddenly remembering, she broke off her sentence, and left merely a suggestion of what was in her mind.

"I believe you really hate those people," said Muriel, reading in Thora's face a horrible suspicion. "Isn't it so? Ask Mr. Kelly what he knows of their 'blood atonement.'"

The girl turned with a dignity of manner quite new to her, and put a direct question to Mr. Kelly.

"Tell me," she said, "do you think the Mormons, with all their religious talk, could persuade themselves that even a murder was an act of righteousness?"

"I know they could, from experience," replied the man promptly. "I had a discussion on the subject one day, with an Elder in Salt Lake, who had shown me great hospitality. He was trying to justify a

friend whom I condemned for being implicated in a mysterious affair which ended in bloodshed. He asked me quite coolly if I had ever killed a wasp, or any crawling creature which disturbed my peace. I owned to having often done so, which brought a smile of triumph to his face. 'You did it,' he said, 'because the insect came in your way. It is justifiable to remove anything unpleasant which intrudes, and brings a harmful influence. I hold that if enemies to our faith come and spy upon us for the purpose of betraying our plans, it is right to take steps to free ourselves, and treat such people as spiders, snakes, and venomous reptiles.' I remonstrated with him, pointing out that men and spiders were very different. He could not see my point at all. Men and reptiles, he argued, were both created by the same Hand, and if it were the will of God that both should live, the Creator's design was as much infringed by destroying an insect, as taking the life of a man. From such conversations as these I gathered that much more was going on in Mormondom than a casual observer would appreciate. They glorify murder just as they sanction polygamy, because it is the same as the ancient faith of Moses. In earlier days, the almost constant practice of lynch law in Utah, made the life of women an hourly terror. Let a wife venture to bring polygamy into disrepute

by so much as a word, or in any way expose the weakness of an Elder, and some hideous punishment would be hers. It seemed as if their very thoughts were under a secret surveillance, since the reason for revolting barbarities was often unknown. A word spoken lightly perhaps, a simple action long since forgotten, brought punishment of the grossest kind."

"They are simply devils!" said Muriel, watching Thora's set face, with its look of determination, and stern resolve.

"Absolutely," continued Howard Kelly. "A woman told an emigrant, in the hearing of a Mormon Elder, that polygamy was a system of abominations. That night she was snatched up by a man on horseback, gagged, carried into the woods, stripped, and tied to a tree, cruelly scourged, and left there bleeding from her wounds till the following night, when she was taken back fainting to her husband's doorstep, where she lay, unattended, till the morning. Another young girl was spirited away to the same wood, where the brutes seared her mouth and tongue with red hot irons. In this treatment of helpless women, the Lord was supposed to prosper and aid the tormentors. They would mark down a woman for simply showing curiosity on matters of small importance. 'She is doomed,' the Elders said, 'for the sin that destroyed Eve will be her destruction also.' Apart from

this, husbands had always unlimited power in the punishment of wives, the most common being solitary confinement, or stripes administered by the man himself."

"Do you still appreciate the idea of mixing with these people, Thora?" asked Mrs. Barcroft.

The girl rose excitedly. She stood before them with her cheeks ablaze. The cold pale face, which to Howard Kelly had appeared mask-like in its mysterious stillness, now quivered and glowed with life. He thought he had never seen anything more wonderful than the flash of her eyes, as her colour came and went, or heard a more pathetic voice, as she replied in quick uneven tones:—

"Of course, I shall go. Everything I have heard to-day adds weight to a suspicion which I hardly dare name. You know my story," turning to the man. "Muriel has told you how Ezra died. His illness puzzled the English doctors. It no longer puzzles me. I am convinced those Mormon fiends found some way of administering poison which left no trace. I suspect Sidney Sharp of being an enemy disguised as a friend. He is the man I want to run to earth. Unconsciously, he is playing into my hands. Nearly all the murders committed by Mormons have been instigated by their priestly leaders. Ezra told me of men, living now in Utah, whose lives are doomed by Mormon law, but spared for a time by

Mormon policy. They know they are certain to be killed, but they do not try to escape, so infatuated are they by their religion—so convinced that the shedding of their blood, by the servants of God, will bring them salvation. Cowed by superstitious fears, they drag on a weary existence, adding weight and influence to Mormonism, not knowing at what hour the sword may fall. These murderous preachers hypnotise them into the belief that their spirits can be saved through the destruction of the flesh. Why should Ezra Dyer have escaped? You must know, as I do, that he did not escape, nor was his death natural. He was as surely murdered as the men whose skeletons were dug up in Brigham Young's garden. I am only a woman, but there is no limit to what a woman may do when she feels as I feel."

Her words rang true; they silenced Muriel, who could find no suitable reply as Thora held out her hand in farewell. She kissed Mrs. Barcroft with passionate intensity, as if for the last time, and moved to the door. Her eyes looked glazed now, she forgot the presence of Howard Kelly, forgot even that she was leaving her friend's house. Everything faded; only a mist of pain seemed closing round her.

"I'll see her to the carriage. Poor girl, how she suffers!" whispered Howard Kelly, signing to Muriel not to ring.

He followed the black robed figure, con-

scious of a lump in his throat. Never before had he been so moved by a woman. He drew close to her side, bent over her, and spoke gently.

"Oh course, you must go to Utah," he said, taking her hand. "It is just what I should do if I were in your place."

A half joyful look of relief leaped to her eyes.

"Ah! then you understand?"

"Perfectly," he answered. "Good-bye."



CHAPTER XVI

A NOBLE ARMY OF WIVES

FAREWELLS were being said at a busy London station, and, standing by a reserved carriage, Muriel held Thora's hand tightly, as if she would never let her go.

Mrs. Sidney Sharp, who had already taken her seat, watched the little groups on the platform with a disinterested air. She was a very different woman to the Nurse Baker of old. Fashionably attired, with a somewhat hard expression, she seemed anxious to retain her newly found dignity, and wear her handsome clothing as if such luxuries had always fallen to her lot. With Thora it was different. Money left her unspoiled. The stamp of a great sorrow made earthly things appear so small, that she merely thought of her wealth in connection with a mysterious tragedy, which she intended solving if it took a lifetime.

Sidney Sharp bowed low, as Thora presented him to Mrs. Barcroft, who had been hoping to escape the introduction.

"I am especially charmed to make your acquaintance," he said, "knowing you were a friend of my beloved and much lamented cousin. It was a terrible blow to our community, that in his last days he chose to

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dwell in the tents of wickedness, rather than to tarry among the Saints. In the past he desired greatly the prosperity of Zion, and the peace of Jerusalem. He realised that in Salt Lake City the Lord has founded His chambers. Alas! that my departed brother encountered the whirlpools of sin."

He turned tearful eyes on Thora, shrugging his shoulders with a deep drawn sigh, which conveyed a world of regret, and something of accusation.

Mrs. Barcroft listened to the rigmarole in utter amazement. She always feared to mention Ezra's death before Thora. To hear him thus openly abused, brought a feeling of heated annoyance to the sensitive mind.

"Really," she answered under her breath, "I think it is ill-timed to condemn the dead, and in Thora's hearing, too."

Sidney Sharp shook his head, and waved his hand lightly.

"The tongue must declare as the spirit giveth utterance," he replied, without lowering his voice. "Through the channel of the holy and eternal priesthood of the Almighty, I am allowed free speech, and also revelations. I know that I have received such blessings, as will assuredly secure my exaltation in the kingdom of Christ. I doubt not, that among the gods of eternity, I shall find a throne."

Mrs. Barcroft turned away in disgust. She could not bear to listen to his blasphemy

"My dear," she whispered to Thora, "there is time even now to draw back. You simply cannot travel in the society of that horrid creature and his depraved English wife. She must realise what he is. No nice woman could have married him."

"Time to draw back," murmured Thora, "just ten minutes," glancing at the clock with a smile. "No, Muriel, I must, for a season, cast in my lot with the 'Saints,' there is no choice."

She looked up, for someone had spoken her name in cheerful tones.

"Oh! how kind of you to come and see me off," she gasped, her eyes meeting Howard Kelly's, the man who had understood, the man who had said that of course she must go.

He held her fingers a moment in a firm grasp.

"I have not come to see you off, I, too, am starting for America by this train. I travel in your boat."

A gasp of relief escaped Muriel, and a flood of colour rushed to her cheeks, as she realised the good news.

"Thank God!" she exclaimed. "Thora will have one friend, at least, to whom she can turn in time of trouble."

"I have reserved a carriage," said the girl, "won't you join us? There is plenty of room, if you don't mind my Mormon companions."

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Sidney Sharp crept up, and touched her elbow.

"Would you speak a word to my wife?" he whispered.

Thora went to the open door of the private compartment.

Mrs. Sharp had evidently been schooled by her husband, for she began speaking at once, in a very determined tone.

"Sidney is anxious you should not ask anyone to travel in this carriage. He dislikes mixing with the heathen, and he saw you greeting a friend just now."

Thora drew herself up. She had no idea of being dictated to by Mrs. Sharp.

"I have already offered Mr. Kelly a seat," she said. "My courier reserved the carriage, and if Mr. Sharp has any objection, he can quite well find a place for himself in another part of the train."

"But he has asked Clara Young to join us, we have also offered to chaperone her to Salt Lake. She is a descendant of Brigham Young, and a very good Mormon. See, she's standing there," pointing to a black eyed girl with a bright complexion, conversing with Elder Sharp. "I am sure it would be very distasteful to her to meet Mr. Kelly, as well as crowding us up."

"We have plenty of room," replied Thora. "Please say no more about it. Both Mr. Sharp and Miss Young have their

remedy, and can go in other carriages if they really object."

Her decided manner silenced Kate, who tossed her head, muttering:—"Oh, very well," with an air of decided offence.

Meanwhile, Muriel had seized the opportunity for a few private words with Howard Kelly.

"Why are you going?" she asked eagerly. "Is it chance or arrangement?"

"Necessity," he said.

"The necessity of business or pleasure?"

"The business of life," he answered, "and the pleasure of suffering in a good cause."

"Don't tease me, just say what you mean, we've only a minute."

"You will laugh at me."

"Do I ever laugh?"

"Well—sometimes."

"With people, but not at them."

"I know. Then think of me, when I am gone, as a traveller who cannot resist the excuse for a journey, and as a man who is very human."

"I believe you have fallen in love with Thora at sight."

"Such things have happened before."

"But her heart is buried in the grave of a dead man."

"I do not aspire to either the heart or the hand of so beautiful and wealthy a girl, but I cannot help being haunted by her



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face. I want to be her friend, and she may need one in the near future, you know that yourself. Her sad, grave eyes would never have ceased to reproach me, in fancy, if I had held back now. Perhaps I'm a fool, I daresay I am well worth laughing at, but sometimes inclination, superstition, desire—call it what you will—goads us to action with such power that we have no choice, or free will. We must follow the call, on the chance of making ourselves ridiculous, and possibly wretched. This, remember, is a confession. I beg you will never let her suspect."

Muriel gazed up at him with a reverent expression.

"Howard," she said, "I always thought well of you, but never so highly as at this moment. I believe you have been raised up Providentially. I feel nearer tears than laughter, but I really believe they are tears of joy. If it is any pleasure to you to know that I shall rest more comfortably on my pillows because you are taking this journey, you may feel you have lifted a weight from my mind. Bring her back safely to me. Don't leave her unprotected amongst those devils, for I love Thora like a daughter, only, unfortunately, I cannot control her actions, I have not a mother's authority."

The stir of departure silenced her words; the girl was back at her side, kissing her and murmuring "Good-bye."

Muriel had the satisfaction of seeing Howard follow Thora into the carriage. The Sharps were looking decidedly sour, but Clara Young peeped at the stranger with keen sparkling eyes, that denoted approval.

"Good-bye! Good-bye!"

Thora waved from the window, watching Muriel's figure till the platform was out of sight, then she settled herself beside Mr. Kelly, and introduced him to her Mormon circle.

Clara Young bowed and smiled, turning to Thora with a look of inquiry.

"Are you a Mormon?" she asked.

"No."

"Oh! the pity of it, the pity." Her smile vanished as she spoke, and for awhile she appeared strangely depressed. Then suddenly, with a start, she threw up her veil, and a look of great joy broke upon her face. She bent forward, across Howard Kelly, and grasped Thora's hands in both her own. Gazing at her with a fanatical expression, she murmured hoarsely:—

"Sister, I want to bless you."

Thora drew back.

"Oh! please don't," she replied.

Sidney Sharp shook his head in disapproval at the objection.

"Miss Young," he whispered, "can give you a blessing in the unknown tongue. She is especially inspired."

Clara paid no heed to the interruption,

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but instantly began a rapid succession of articulate and connected sounds, which she confessed, on conclusion, to not understanding at all.

"You see," she said, "for a person endowed with my gift, it is merely necessary to open the mouth, and utter whatever words are given, and the Lord will make them a language. An interpreter is needed to explain the hidden meaning, for no person ever has both gifts. I have been demonstrating in London with great success. Perhaps if Brother Sharp were to stand up, and call upon the Lord in silent prayer for a few moments, the words I have spoken might be made plain."

He rose, and clutching the luggage rail, bent his head, moving his lips without a sound. Then he reseated himself opposite Thora.

"Miss Young has blessed you," he said, "in the language of heaven. She has told you that a woman, in and of herself, can never progress to the highest place, for as Eve led Adam out of the garden, he must lead her back. If she slights the great duty imposed upon her, and wilfully remains single, she is of no service in the economy of creation, and therefore is condemned. Miss Young adds that, later on, it will be given her to tell you of baptism, and marriage for the dead. Many a Saint has been baptised for some relative, or eminent person, who died long since. By this means George

Washington, Benjamin Franklin, and Thomas Jefferson, are members of the Mormon Church."

"I'm afraid," said Thora, "that your friend has been taking rather a lot of unnecessary trouble on my behalf, for you see, not being a Mormon, I don't believe these things."

Miss Young glanced in the direction of the speaker with a sudden tragic intensity.

"That, alas! has been your curse. Had you embraced our religion, the vengeance of heaven might never have fallen to crush your young life."

Thora accepted the allusion to her recent sorrow in silence, only Howard Kelly fancied he noticed a hardening of her lips, and a slight quiver in the muscles of her face.

Howard Kelly turned to Clara Young, and asked, as if it were the most commonplace question in the world:—

"Are you a believer in polygamy?"

He might have been saying: "Do you think the weather will keep fine?" so unemotional was his voice, yet he felt his words had an effect upon Mrs. Sidney Sharp, who sat, if possible, a little more upright, and turned her face away to the window.

Clara clasped her hands, and nodded slowly. Now again, a piquant expression crept to her face, suggesting smiles, as she cast a look of admiration in the direction of Elder Sharp.



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"As you are not a Mormon, Mr. Kelly, I may as well tell you that our people would never have practised polygamy, except in accordance with an express revelation from God. Our prophet and martyr, Joseph Smith, asked the Lord about it, since He justified Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, also Moses, David, and Solomon. In the revelation, heavy punishment was threatened to all those women who refused, without good cause, to give their husbands second wives."

This time, though outwardly addressing Howard Kelly, she seemed to throw her words at Kate Sharp, who consequently feigned an increased interest in the passing view.

The strained situation became apparent to the quick intelligence of the man who had asked the embarrassing question. Howard Kelly felt he was making a voyage of discovery into the minds and methods of his fellow travellers; already he saw breakers ahead for the late Nurse Baker. He wondered if she wished herself back in the nursing home, a free English subject in civilised London.

"I suppose," he said, "you are naturally proud of your descent from the celebrated Brigham Young."

Clara drew herself up with a dignity which made the slim, girlish figure look queen-like and impressive.

"Indeed, yes," she replied, "he held

a most remarkable position. Why, in 1870, the Pope, Queen Victoria, and Brigham Young, were the only heads of church and state in the civilised world."

"I suppose," said Thora, with veiled cynicism, "there are a good many of you, as Mr. Young's alliances were so numerous."

"I could give you the names of all his wives, we have them in our family annals. Five of the number, Lucy Bigelow, Clara Chase, Miss Twiss, Martha Bowker, and Harriet Barney, were married in very rapid succession. Harriet left a Gentile husband to become the Prophet's wife, but, unfortunately for her, retained his affections only a short time."

Sidney Sharp broke in upon Clara's historical recollections.

"Excuse my saying so, Miss Young, but it is not expedient to tell your family affairs to the heathen."

Howard Kelly capped the rebuke with a quick retort :—

"She has told us nothing that is not publicly known," he declared. "Salt Lake and its Mormon leaders are not new subjects to me. Miss Young has omitted to mention the beautiful Emmeline, who for twelve years ruled as undisputed queen of Brigham's home. I have seen her portrait, a lovely woman indeed, and her ten children inherited her looks. The jealousy of the other wives must have been pretty bad for him to con-

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struct a private hall leading from his office to Emmeline's boudoir, that he might visit her without observation. This tall, fair haired, violet eyed woman, occupied during meals the seat of honour at the right hand of her husband, and received her visitors in the grand saloon. Bitter, indeed, must have been the day of awakening, when Emmeline grew faded, and the Prophet turned his affections to Amelia Folson who, report says, much enjoyed her triumph. Finally she was 'sealed' to him in the Endowment House. After that she was his sole companion at the theatre, rode beside him in his carriage, and lived in her own palace. Though, later on, he married others, she was the recognised Queen of the Harem until his death. It seems he never failed in his wooing."

"He left a noble army of wives," said Clara, in tones of approval, "and was the father of numerous children."

With this remark she opened a paper, and dismissed the subject of her kinsman. The rest of the party followed her example, and it was not until they were talking alone on board ship, that Thora and Howard Kelly alluded to their extraordinary train journey.

"I'm afraid our conversation must have made Mrs. Sharp rather uncomfortable," said Thora.

"Indeed, she is much to be pitied," replied the man, speaking with genuine

concern. "It was in deference to her feelings, I did not describe poor Emmeline's last days. She was absolutely broken hearted, and became a confirmed morphine eater. According to the account of a nurse, her last hours were too horrible for description. Her disfigured body, wasted to a skeleton, was placed in a cheap coffin, and buried with no grief, and little ceremony. Brigham made a few remarks at the grave, and a week after entertained a large party of excursionists. It is said that when first Brigham's carriage used to stand for hours before the house of Amelia's father, in the early days of courtship, Emmeline, accustomed to her husband's exclusive devotion, would rave, and beg, and pray frantically by turns, till her reason all but left her."

Thora shuddered, for in fancy she saw Nurse Baker playing the same agonised part, swept aside, in favour of another Mrs. Sharp.

"I was thinking," she murmured, "what can one expect of Clara Young, descended from such a man? I believe she is already contemplating robbing Mrs. Sharp of her husband. Did you see the looks she cast at him in the carriage?"

"I could not fail to, and unfortunately his wife must have suspected Miss Clara's intentions. That was why I sounded the young woman on her opinions. I hoped she would be shocked at my question about polygamy, and so save Mrs. Sharp's feelings.

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Are you not frightened of these people, and their strange customs ? ”

Thora shook her head.

“ No, the sensation of fear is dead in me. Sometimes I fancy I should like the experience of any sensation except numb regret, and something which is worse. I believe you guess what that is ? ”

“ Revenge ? ” he queried.

“ I suppose it is revenge, but the word has an ugly sound, and appears, after all, the lowest form of consolation. Perhaps I have really only the desire to know the worst, any pain sooner than this mystery and darkness. That really embraces all the horror of death—not knowing, uncertainty, questionings, which can never be answered. It hurts by day, it torments by night. I am like searchers who look for a lost body, which they wish to reverence and honour. Once the secret of its hiding place is found, the mourners feel satisfied. At last, they can rest, and hope for some future peace.”

“ But it’s a pity your search throws you among people who have degraded the human conception of the Deity. I consider that the heathen philosophers of two thousand years ago were infinitely superior to the modern day Mormons, with their gross idea of spiritual things. In their creed purity is never hinted at, or taught. Plato’s Deity is far finer than Brigham’s.”

“ You do hate the Mormons,” said Thora

"I knew a man in the old village where I lived as a boy," said Howard Kelly, "who planted his crops according to the moon, and would only dig when certain 'signs' were correct. He believed he had discovered the elixir of life in a plant which grew in his back garden, was often warned by dreams, and frequently recounted his visions of the night. Most people have met a man of the kind. Now try and picture fifty thousand people of this class, swept by waves of religious fanaticism into one place, each working on the other's riotous imagination, and you have a fair idea of Utah's Mormon population, with a large sprinkling of that most loathed and detestable of reptiles—the Mormon spy."

"Such a one as Sidney Sharp," said Thora.

"God forbid he is as bad as that! Our language can hold no terms which could describe these creatures of darkness, who find a lair among the Salt Lake police and their underlings. They creep among the bushes in the gardens of private houses, eavesdroppers, to carry away the words of an apostate. In the territory you seek, be amply assured that Mormon treachery compares well with that of Spanish Jesuits, and the intrigues of old Italian Courts, in a past age of political unrest."

Mrs. Sidney Sharp was bearing down upon them, she wanted to show Thora

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where their deck chairs had been placed, and the two women strolled away together.

"This is really your honeymoon voyage," said Thora. "I promise not to intrude upon you and Mr. Sharp more than is absolutely necessary."

"I am very glad you are with us, it is everything for me to know an Englishwoman on board. I feel a little strange, not having entirely accepted Sidney's religious beliefs," answered Kate, with unexpected humility.

"Are you happy in your new life?"

Thora asked the question confidentially. She looked into Kate's face with questioning eyes, her mind still full of Howard Kelly's recent conversation.

For a moment the bride hesitated, as if she would unburden her soul, then she checked the impulse, and answered decidedly:

"I am most happy. I have everything I want in the world. I could not possibly be happier."

"I am so glad."

Even as Thora replied, Sidney Sharp came in sight, with Clara grasping his arm, apparently afraid of the slight swaying of the boat.

Kate saw the figures, and hastened her steps.

"Excuse me," she said. "I must fetch my husband, he has my smelling salts, and I feel a little faint."



CHAPTER XVII

IN A NEW WORLD

"I WONDER where Thora has gone," said Addie Sutton, glancing across the breakfast table with a suspicious expression. "Abroad is such a vague word, and we don't even know who is chaperoning her. You must feel rather curious, Ralph? After all, she is your daughter, an only child, young, wealthy, good looking. Surely she owes her father some respect and consideration. It makes one feel rather small to be quite ignorant of her movements."

Addie had been thinking long and deeply on the subject, before broaching it to her husband. She was burning with suppressed indignation at Thora's complete desertion of the home. She would have loved to be acknowledged by her step-daughter, now that Ezra Dyer's fortune made Thora a desirable member of the family circle, one whom the second Mrs. Sutton would welcome gladly for her money and influence.

"The girl is certainly very independent for her years," sighed Addie's husband, "but we must not forget she has behaved most generously to us. She was under no obligation to send me the very lavish sum,

which I must say I should have preferred to decline, seeing that she owes her wealth to an Elder of the Mormon Church. I hear there are quite a number of their missionaries in England at the present time; batches of girls are sent to Utah to join the sect, and reap the whirlwind of their folly. Luckily, of late, the press has taken it up to a certain extent, but not sufficiently to warn England of a menace which threatens the virtue of her daughters."

Adelaide hardly listened. Busy with her own ideas, she was thinking if Ralph Sutton's daughter could be taken up by a Society woman like Mrs. Barcroft, surely his wife might reasonably expect to find herself in the same set. The very fact that Thora was received, should give her step-mother the entrée to that social sphere, which floated in the alluring mists of the bride's imagination. She had chafed bitterly under Thora's conduct, and now, in her absence, Addie schemed for an opportunity of bettering her position.

"Yes," she mused, "I must say I feel a little worried about Thora. The girl is too pretty to be wandering about the world unguarded, and I am convinced Mrs. Barcroft could give us some information as to her movements. She will understand I am naturally anxious about my husband's child, and I think I shall venture to call on her, just to find out where Thora has gone."

Mr. Sutton, bluff man that he was, lacking imagination, and easily led by his young wife, could not resist a smile. He saw plainly why Addie suddenly developed an interest in her step-daughter's welfare.

"Want to be in with the swells?" he queried, good naturedly. "Well, I don't blame you. After all, you're just as good as they are, and thanks to Thora, we have enough money now to make a bit of a show."

The mistress of the West Kensington flat, coloured to the roots of her tightly netted hair.

"How you do jump at conclusions, Ralph!" she said, compressing her lips, and thrusting her chin into the curve of her throat. If she could have inflated her figure she would have done so, but unfortunately, Addie had no figure to inflate.

"To-day," he continued, "is Mrs. Barcroft's afternoon at home. I remember Thora always went to her on Tuesday, to help her receive. It would be quite a good enough excuse for you to look in, and ask if she knows Thora's address abroad. Keep up the anxiety, just to pass off your going to see Mrs. B., when I suppose she ought really to come and see you first."

"These Society women are so very busy," murmured Addie. "I really did not expect her to trouble about me."

"But she troubled to drive up here to call on Thora."

"Ah! that was a case of illness, and Thora was her particular friend."

"She took tea with the first Mrs. S. once or twice, when I was out."

"Probably she was bothered into it by Thora, who would naturally wish her mother to be shown some civility. I shall feel quite satisfied if Mrs. Barcroft asks me to pop in and see her now and again. I shan't expect her to pilgrimage here from Mayfair. We are quite out of her beat."

Thus Addie slyly prepared the way for a possible snub. She was well aware that Mrs. Barcroft might prefer not to return the visit.

Since his second marriage, Mr. Sutton had coarsened considerably. Contact with the Meals and their friends seemed to bring out all that was common in the nature the first Mrs. Sutton tried so hard to refine. He was undoubtedly happier, for Addie never found fault with his manners or ideas, nor did she shudder if now and again his speech betrayed a faulty education.

"I'll do you proud," he said, suddenly, beaming across the table at the underbred little woman, whose view of life was so admirably suited to his own. "I will engage a private carriage to take you in state to call at the Barcrofts' house. No omnibus or cab, but a brougham, with a man in livery."

Addie's face broke into smiles. Already she felt herself elevated to the enviable

pinnacle of a fashionable, luxury loving woman of the modern world. But her conscience pricked her slightly, and she murmured that perhaps it would be too extravagant, in a tone which pleadingly invited contradiction.

Ralph Sutton laughed off the protest. He loved to give his girl wife pleasure.

"A carriage or nothing, my dearie," he said, conscious of the years which divided her age from his own, and glad that one so young could appreciate him with such honest admiration. "I guess you'll take Mrs. Barcroft by storm in your best clothes, and maybe it will put Thora down a peg or two in that lady's estimation, when she realises what a charming step-mother her protégée has disowned."

Addie spent the morning in a flutter of anticipation. She would wear her red velvet afternoon gown, made by Mrs. Meal, with a sham lace collar, studded with jet, bought at a sale, and a black felt toque, from their favourite hat shop at Shepherd's Bush.

It was really most providential Thora's leaving England without informing Ralph of her movements, it gave Mrs. Sutton such an excellent reason for the informality of her visit.

The carriage was ordered at 4 o'clock, and in great excitement the youthful wife awaited its coming for quite ten minutes on the doorstep of the Mansions. She thought it would sound so well, if any one she knew

happened to be passing, to drop, in conversation, that she was waiting for her carriage.

When at last the neat little brougham arrived, for which Ralph had telephoned in a very loud voice from the office, hoping to impress his fellow clerks, Mrs. Sutton told herself with pride it was good to be married to such a liberal and kind hearted man.

As she drove to the fashionable haunts of the London she so little understood, it was like journeying to another world. She had only learnt from the penny novelette, and the Society paper, how those people lived who were, by the accident of birth and fortune, placed in an entirely different environment to her own. Only to herself could she have acknowledged the curiosity with which she awaited that thrilling moment, when she would be ushered into Mrs. Barcroft's presence. Addie remembered her first and only glimpse of Thora's friend, in a victoria drawn by high stepping horses, the day Mr. Sutton crossed the road and betrayed his desire for consolation. What a vision of elegance that fleeting moment had flashed before the critical gaze of the girl on the pavement! She could remember the beauty of the well cut garments, which seemed part of Mrs. Barcroft's personality, the hat framing her daintily dressed hair to perfection, the flowers she wore, and the fluttering ostrich feather boa. At that time those jealous eyes saw

something of arrogance in the way the occupant of the carriage settled herself among rugs and cushions, but to-day Addie, in the glory of her hired brougham, thought of Mrs. Barcroft with approval, and decided if possible to win her friendship.

"Of course, I can hold my own with any of them," she told herself. "Wasn't I educated at the same school as Thora, and isn't my mother as good as that queer, unsociable Mrs. Sutton?"

The question was not easy to answer, since the Meals had never been given an opportunity of associating with Thora's mother.

Addie caught her breath, and quickly dragged her veil even more tightly across her face, as the carriage drew up before Mrs. Barcroft's white house in Mayfair. She could not imagine how it was the door opened mysteriously, before she had time to get out and ring. It didn't open like the doors in West Kensington, but just seemed to fly back, as if worked by a magic spring. Within she caught a first glimpse of red velvet carpet, the soft velvety red of certain roses that looked as if they were made in Paris, and ought to be blooming upon a fashionable hat, instead of decorating trees in June gardens. There were palms, too, in brass rimmed tubs of polished wood, mounted high on carved pedestals at the foot of the staircase. The men servants, with

their quiet respectful air, filled Addie with sudden confusion, as the tallest took from her trembling hand an umbrella she had forgotten to leave in the brougham, and which, after all, she need not have brought, since she was driving in a closed carriage. She could not tell why, but quite against her will, her courage seemed ebbing out somewhere in the vicinity of her boots, which looked thick and clumsy under the red velveteen skirt, which cleared the ground and was quite a different shade to the pleasing tone of the stair carpet. She had no time to look at the handsome ornaments in the hall, for a very straight masculine back began vanishing down a corridor, and Addie knew she was expected to follow. She felt distinctly annoyed at the realisation that her knees were knocking together, and she would have given much to be back in the brougham, driving to the old familiar haunts, beyond the boundary of London's fashionable houses.

"Mrs. Sutton."

She heard her name spoken in a low but resounding voice, which filled the elegant drawing-room into which the man with the lofty bearing ushered her. If those square shoulders could have spoken, she fancied they would have said:—"Here you are, and now I've done with you."

Mrs. Barcroft rose from a distant chair, by a great clump of flowering plants, which

filled the air with perfume. As she advanced, Addie caught the music of her silken skirts, and was conscious of a gracious presence, clothed in dainty laces, and chiffon of pale lilac. Here and there the glint of diamonds flashed mysterious eyes of fire from the soft folds of her bodice, while a large amethyst clasped the stems of the pink carnations that blended so alluringly with the faint mauve of her gown.

Other women were in the room, women from those unknown ranks, which a short time ago it had seemed so easy to enter, from Addie's uninitiated point of view. Now she felt the mysterious difference which placed her apart, making her stammer and hesitate upon the threshold of this strange, almost paralysing world.

Muriel Barcroft was a quick reader of faces. She saw the pause, and the frightened expression in Addie's eyes; saw, too, the colour which mounted to her cheeks, denoting the confusion she had not sufficient assurance to hide. The woman of the world summed up at once the woman of limited experience and poor birth. She saw the vulgar ostentation of cheap finery, the lack of breeding in manner as well as feature, and noted the sudden knowledge which came to Addie, that she was out of her depth in the waters of confusion.

The newcomer little guessed how easily she was read. Could she have seen into

the kind heart of her hostess, she might have ventured to enjoy the novelty of luxurious surroundings, which struck such a sharp contrast to the houses she had known and visited in her own sphere.

"I came," stammered Addie, quickly, "to—to ask you for Thora's address, but I see you have visitors, and I'm afraid I am intruding."

How different to the scene she pictured only that morning in the privacy of her humble abode! Then she saw herself sailing in, with all the grace and dignity of her step-daughter, to take by storm the citadel which she knew Thora had named "her second home." Vaguely she realised, though she had little time to think, that the gulf which lay between herself, and the first Mrs. Sutton's child, was an appreciable one, a difference, hard to define, but absolutely real.

"Oh! please come and sit down. Of course you must stay to tea," said Mrs. Barcroft, taking her hand, and drawing her to a chair.

The words were both kind and friendly, yet they unconsciously added to Mrs. Sutton's humiliation, since they suggested a favour, for she knew well that afternoon tea was a matter of course when people called in Muriel Barcroft's set. She felt she was an outsider, temporarily admitted to this little circle, as she seated herself awkwardly on

the white brocade chair, wondering if her dress would soil its delicate embroidery, and if she dared rest her elbows on the gold carved arms.

"My husband and I are both terribly anxious about Thora," continued Addie, avoiding the eyes of the other guests, and speaking quickly. "It was so very strange of her to go away without telling her father her destination."

Muriel saw no reason to deceive the Suttons. Thora was now quite independent, they could not in any way interfere with her movements.

"Thora has gone to Utah," she said. "I saw her off."

Addie gave such a violent start, that Mrs Barcroft thought she would bounce out of her chair.

"To Utah!" she cried, her voice rising, and striking a strangely common note in its shrillness, "where the Mormons are?"

"Yes, she has gone to see about her property. She had some business to transact."

"Really!" Addie gathered sufficient courage to be sarcastic. "So she says; so she tells you. I know her."

The words were accompanied by a defiant toss of the head, and a little snort. The women, who at first glanced towards her with rather pitying eyes, now looked amused, as if some strange creature were in their midst to afford entertainment.

Addie continued hotly.

"Ralph says she had always a wild spirit, she liked those awful Mormon Elders, she wasn't contented with setting her cap at a respectable Englishman. We both think she has a screw loose, and that is why she behaved so oddly to us. She took after her mother in many ways."

"I was very fond of her mother," said Mrs. Barcroft softly, and the gentle, dignified voice contrasted so strongly with Addie's strident tones, that Addie herself was aware of her own disadvantage, and began once more to feel ridiculous.

"I do not think you need fear for Thora, Mrs. Sutton. She has a good and sensible companion in an old friend of mine, who promised me, before he left, to see she came to no harm."

"Gone off alone with a man!" gasped Addie, her jaw dropping, and her hands falling limply over the gilt arms of the chair. "Well I never!"

"No, of course not," murmured Mrs. Barcroft, "she is chaperoned by a married couple."

"Mormons, you bet."

"Well, the man is a cousin of Mr. Dyer, and his wife was the hospital nurse who attended poor Ezra in his last illness."

An elderly woman, who looked as if she had been moulded into her clothes, and bore herself with the air of a *grande dame*

bent forward, levelling long handled tortoise-shell glasses at Muriel.

"Are you talking of that charming girl I used to meet here so often, the girl with the large mysterious eyes, and rather startling beauty? I heard only the other day she had come into a fortune."

"I'm her step-mother," chimed in Addie, before Mrs. Barcroft could reply. "Awfully queer eyes, hasn't she? They used to frighten the girls at school. We were educated together."

Clearly this fact was one in which the second Mrs. Sutton took unmistakable pride. She squared her shoulders under their folds of cheap lace, while her soul said within itself:

"What do you think of that, my lady? I may not be so high class, but I've had advantages the same as Thora, and if you could know her, you could know me."

Yet even as the words passed through her mind, she knew if the speaker had bidden her instantly to a feast, she would not have dared to accept. Never again, she told herself, could she stand up to be a target for the curious glances of women whose clothes were made in Paris, and whose eyes unconsciously condemned the homely cut of a gown designed and executed by Mrs. Meal.

"Can you tell me when Thora is expected back in England?" asked Addie,

suddenly startled by the appearance of a man with a large silver tray, containing cups of tea, dainty shell-like things lined with dull gold, such as she had never hoped to drink from, even after deciding to take Mrs. Barcroft by storm on an "at home" day. She gazed upon the dark liquid helplessly.

"Please," she said, "I always take some milk in mine."

The words were scarcely out of her lips before a second figure, with a smaller tray, stood before her, on which she espied a cream jug and silver sugar basin. She could have bitten her tongue out for speaking so soon. Mrs. Barcroft quickly continued the conversation about Thora.

"I have no idea how soon we shall see her home, but she has promised to write, and she never disappoints me."

"Maybe she'll remain out there always," said Addie. "Her father was told that Utah is a mighty fine place. Probably the Mormons won't let her come back, they will want her money for their Church, and she is so wild, I daresay she would take up the religion just to spite us."

"No fear of that."

Mrs. Barcroft spoke soothingly, as she rose to greet fresh callers. Her movement towards the door left Addie alone, for the women near her turned away, and conversed among themselves.

She fell to wondering how she should leave. It took some courage to rise up from her distant corner, say good-bye to the hostess who was now pre-occupied with newcomers, and get to the door across that long stretch of parquet flooring, which had seemed so alarmingly slippery as she entered. There were certainly some islands of refuge in the handsome rugs which made patches of colour on the shining surface, but it was quite impossible to spring from one to the other, like people who cross rivers on stepping stones. Just for a few moments Addie availed herself of the opportunity of watching the scene around. She noted how easily the others talked and moved, and with what disrespectful ease they appropriated the elegant chairs, pushing into comfortable shapes the elaborate satin cushions at their backs. They laughed a good deal, in a quiet way, which gave Addie the idea that some veiled scandal was being discussed. She wondered if they would have anything to say about her when she left the room. Somehow she felt complete confidence in the good heartedness of Mrs. Barcroft, whose self-assurance gave the idea that she would never descend to "explain" anybody, or apologise for their presence at her house. Addie knew the hot choking sensation, which gave her real pangs of distress, arose from inward shame at finding herself unequal to the society around. She was angry at the

judgment which allowed her to come; she realised to the full that her position was verging on the ridiculous.

Perhaps she need not tell Ralph what a failure the afternoon proved to be. She would describe the room, with its soothing atmosphere of refinement, without confessing it had made her miserable. He should never know she felt out of her element in Mrs. Barcroft's house, to which Thora resorted with such confidence and pleasure.

The men were coming in again with those alarmingly large trays. She blushed to think that the squares of almond paste on the small slices of rich black cake, had at first been mistaken by her for pieces of cheese. The very fact that the door stood open gave her courage to spring to her feet, which proved the signal for Mrs. Barcroft to rise also.

"I must be going," Addie stammered, holding out her hand. "My carriage is waiting for me."

She was quite sure if she had not made this remark, that Mrs. Barcroft would never have looked behind the embroidered blinds, to see if she were driving or walking. She noticed Muriel answered in a few indefinite words which embodied good-bye, without the smallest hint that she hoped to meet Mrs. Sutton again. The very idea that Addie expected to keep up her acquaintance was so far from Mrs. Barcroft's mind, that

it found expression in her face and manner, in her very smile. As the door closed on the departing vision of red velveteen, it shut her out as completely from her thoughts as from her sight. The intruder walked hurriedly down the broad crimson stairway. Even pictured faces on the walls seemed accusing her of an indiscretion. She was wondering if she might drop one of the visiting cards which Ralph had ordered to be printed at a shop, while they waited, on their honeymoon. She fumbled in her pocket, then drew back her hand quickly, as if she had been stung.

No, Mrs. Barcroft knew the address only too well, should she wish to return the call. Why add to the embarrassment of this situation, by appearing to seek favours?

Her only thought now was the pleasing one of escape. She almost snatched her umbrella from the servant's hand, and hurrying out, slammed the door, before realising that a young footman had crossed the pavement to see her to her carriage.

"Home," she cried, as she stumbled in, and the word had a glad reassuring sound which warmed her chilled heart, reminding her that far from the haunts of Mayfair, she owned a place of refuge in which she was loved and appreciated. As the horse started off at a brisk trot, she leaned back, closing her eyes. Gradually her quick breathing became even, and the fast beating of her

heart slowed down to its natural speed. The agonising experience of trespassing on Thora's territory was at an end, yet Addie could hardly have explained where the agony lay. Mrs. Barcroft was both kind and gracious, no one spoke a harsh or disagreeable word, and the servants were as respectful as if she had been a duchess. All the evil of those unhappy moments centred in herself. She had been her own unrest, the enemy which made the visit such a lamentable failure.

"I wonder," she said to herself, "how it feels to mix with people like that, and to have Thora's assurance, to know they admire you, and want you among them, even though you are poor, and not well dressed. Thora used to go there when her clothes were not nearly as smart as mine are now, and Mrs. Barcroft would come back and visit her mother."

As Addie realised this, she felt her animosity towards her step-daughter gradually fading into awed respect. Thora, she knew, had neither relied on beauty nor talent, she held the magic gift of charm which wins without an effort. She had developed unconsciously a refinement that recognises its own atmosphere, and thrives in the native soil of kindred spirits. A new understanding came to Addie, an insight to mysteries she never grasped before. Strange distinctions, which she would not have

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acknowledged existed a few hours ago, were now made clear to her. She grew calm and thoughtful as she looked life in the face, seeing it as it is, and not as she had imagined it to be. Seldom before had she touched even the border land of deep reflections. No resentment hovered in her mind, she began to feel glad she could understand Thora better. Possibly at some future time, if their paths met, to-day's experience would rise up to help her. She saw they could only be friends on a peculiar footing, with leniency one side, and knowledge the other—the knowledge of their different spheres, which had been revealed that afternoon to the awakened intelligence of Addie Sutton.

She was still working out this problem when the brougham stopped at the Mansions in West Kensington, and her pilgrimage to the unknown came to an end. She sprang out, eager to shake off the hired grandeur of her disappointing drive.

"Any more orders, ma'am?" asked the coachman, touching his hat.

"No," she replied sharply, "nothing further at present."

She ran up the winding flights of stone stairs, and rang impatiently. The maid opened the door—a new servant, engaged by Addie, who objected to keeping one who had been employed by the first Mrs. Sutton.

"Is your master in?" she asked.

"No, ma'am. He came back from the

office, and went out again, after taking a cup of tea."

"Do you know where he has gone, Amelia?"

The girl drew a long face, which she felt must be in keeping with her reply:—

"To the cemetery, to take a wreath to his first wife's grave. The flowers came by hand, such beauties as I never saw. He let me look at them, and he said, 'Those cost some money, I can tell you.' Then he put on his hat, and walked off with the wreath a-hanging on his arm."

"That will do, Amelia," said the second Mrs. Sutton with dignity.

"Shall I get you some tea, ma'am?"

"No, I have taken it already. I have been to an 'at home,' but come and help me out of this dress, I want my short serge skirt and coat, I am going for a walk."

In a very few minutes Addie had shed her finery, and in more homely attire, hurried once more down those endless stairs, which so often made her yearn for the luxury of a lift.

She was puzzled at Ralph's sudden attention to the memory of the departed. Though she knew that Thora's mother was buried at the big cemetery within an easy walk of West Kensington, he had never suggested they should visit the grave—a fact which filled Addie with secret satisfaction.

To be out on the pavement in her walk-

ing skirt seemed pleurably familiar, after the brief state of a hired brougham. She stepped out with a will, feeling as if every humble passer-by was her friend, and almost wishing she might stop and kiss the dirty faces of the gutter children, who had never seen Mayfair. She knew a short cut to the cemetery, for she and Mrs. Meal had once been there to attend the funeral of a well known music-hall star, whose last resting place attracted a crowd of curious Londoners, just as they had been drawn to the various palaces of variety by her popular name.

The short cut took Addie down mean streets. Unyouthful eyes of gutter children gazed eagerly through the window of an undertaker's shop, where freshly fashioned caskets of death, had been placed to attract the morbid fancy of passers-by. It appeared to be a street of undertakers, branching away from the cemetery, like an offshoot of its vast territory, which spread a shadow of sadness on the inhabitants around.

Addie entered the vast sleeping garden with a searching eye. The place seemed such a maze of winding paths and crowded namestones that for a moment she stood confused. Here and there a larger monument dwarfed the smaller ones, and over all the fading light of evening threw its soft, expressive haze.

"No good wondering," she said, "I must just step out, and take my chance."

Thrusting her hands in her pockets, she started off, looking from left to right as she walked, seeking always for one familiar form. At last she spied Ralph in the distance, standing by a magnificent cross, which stretched snowy arms above its fellows, and bore, carved on its bosom of marble, a crown of thorns. She went gently towards the man she loved, stepping on the edge of the grass, that he might not hear her approach.

"Ralph," she whispered, coming up behind him.

He started, and turned towards her, with the ready smile her presence always won. He was too excited to ask why or how she came, as he pointed to the splendid piece of workmanship, which bore the name of Pauline Sutton.

"Isn't it grand?" he cried. "Thora's choice. It wasn't up before she left. She told the makers to send me the design, and ask me to go and see it when finished. She also left a sum of money at the florist's for flowers, so to-day I said I'd bring the wreath myself. I was proud to carry it along the streets."

"You didn't tell me you were coming."

"Well no, my dear, I thought I would take the opportunity while you were out."

She saw his intention rose from good feeling, though he was glad enough to have her with him. He kept fast hold of her hand, as he gazed at the cross.

"I wish," he said, "they had carved a wreath of lilies, instead of those plaited thorns, but that again was Thora's idea. I'm not so sure, Addie, she didn't think I was a thorn in her mother's side. I wonder how it was I couldn't make poor Pauline happy. Thank God, I am more successful with you."

"I believe I understand," whispered Addie, leaning against him with a caressing movement. "I did not until to-day, but my eyes have been opened. I thought I would not tell you. I meant to pretend I liked going to see Mrs. Barcroft, but oh! Ralph, it was quite horrid. I felt as if I had tumbled into another world, a world that didn't want me, and I longed to get back to my dear little home—and to you. There is a difference in class, though one rather hates owning up to it, until it comes and hits you in the face. Pauline was Thora's mother, and gave the girl her nature; Thora was Mrs. Barcroft's most intimate friend, and those two facts explain a good deal to me."

Ralph looked wonderingly at Addie. He respected her for understanding, and he believed at that moment that he had understood all along. Still holding her fingers, he turned away, and like two happy children they strolled hand in hand along the narrow paths, lined with white tombstones in the shadowy mists of evening.

CHAPTER XVIII

A STRANGER'S ADVICE

"OF course we are shunned," said Thora, after one of her long intimate talks with Howard Kelly on board ship, "and personally, I am glad; but I feel it is hardly fair to you. Because I am travelling with Mormon people, I don't see why you should be tarred with the same brush. Why not give us the cold shoulder, and mix with more respectable passengers? I shall quite understand, and it will make no difference to our friendship afterwards, for I've not forgotten we have made a compact to be friends always."

Howard Kelly laughed. His eyes twinkled as they met Thora's, which were grave and inquiring.

"You are very considerate, Miss Sutton, but I would rather stay with you and study your Mormon companions, a thousand times, than fraternise with this ordinary Society set on board. Believe me, I am being absolutely selfish in the matter, and merely consulting my own inclination. I may never again have such an opportunity of monopolising your time, so am greedily

making the most of the goods the gods provide. Still, I do not think you are quite right in fancying yourself shunned. It is a popular idea that you wish to be left alone."

"Ah! they see my sad face and black dress, and perhaps they guess how it is with me."

"I often notice the Reverend Cosmo Crane looking at you, and once or twice he has tried to bring himself under your observation, only I'm afraid I have been in the way, and he did not like to interrupt us. He asked me this morning if you were a relation of mine. He also added he had something he wanted to say to you, and he would venture to introduce himself. He is standing over there on your right, and is evidently hoping I will give up my chair to him. Shall I fetch him? He seems a nice fellow."

Thora consented, not without a secret suspicion that she would far prefer Mr. Kelly's society to that of a stranger, however fascinating. Howard was a link with Muriel and home, now that every moment put a greater distance between England and herself.

He strolled away towards Cosmo Crane, fully aware that many a man had prejudiced himself in the eyes of a woman, by giving her too much of his company.

A moment later, and the clerical figure was seated at Thora's side. She noticed the newcomer looked at her rather curiously.

His eager manner was tinged with a latent shyness, which he tried hard to conceal. A hectic flush rose to his pale ascetic face; he clasped and unclasped his hands as he spoke:—

"I have heard a rumour," he said, after a few preliminary remarks of a purely conventional nature, "that you are on your way to Utah to join the Mormons, and that you have been persuaded to accept their creed."

Thora shook her head, and flushed slightly, turning to him with an emphatic gesture of denial.

"Oh! no," she said, in reassuring tones. "I have not the smallest intention of becoming a Mormon, though I can quite understand how the story originated, since I am travelling with Mr. and Mrs. Sharp. I am merely going to Salt Lake City to see after some property that has been left me."

The little pink spot of colour which had burned on his cheeks, spread suddenly to a healthy crimson glow. His nervous manner instantly vanished, and he beamed upon her with such a genuine smile of relief she felt bound to smile also.

"I am so glad, so very glad," he exclaimed heartily. "Do you know you have been dreadfully on my mind? I could not bear the thought of a young English girl going out to such a people. I was horrified to hear Mrs. Sharp was a London

woman, and had married her husband on quite a short acquaintance. She will have to suffer deeply for her folly, I fear."

"It was very kind of you to worry about me," said Thora. "I see now what was in your heart. You wanted to do a good work, to rescue me from a religion which is notorious for its blasphemy and error."

He cast a grateful look at her for understanding him so well.

"Yes. I had prayed that I might be able to say some word which would turn you from a fatal purpose. I saw you chaperoned by a member of this sect, who believe that salvation is always and only for Mormons. No one has the smallest chance of redemption but through their favour. They even boast they can save the dead, if some Mormon will be baptised in the name of the departed. I feel convinced they have made many converts through hypnotism. Beware they do not 'magnetise' you, they are clever enough for anything. Not many years ago I went to Salt Lake City to inspect its schools and homes, for my Missionary Board, and I may truthfully say, those days were among the most miserable of my life. The whole atmosphere was one of wrong and outrage. It disgusted me to find these degenerate, polygamous Mormons had drawn on the peasant blood of Europe, and through lies and hypocrisy

persuaded ignorant women to surrender to their unscrupulous leadership. They have a perfect genius for keeping family brawls from the public eye. You, as a tourist, would be shown a magnificent town, peopled by polite men, and sweet mannered women, in apparently happy homes. The outward air of amiability, their culture and lavish hospitality, is a Machiavellian hiding of hideous practices, like a grave concealed by flowers. If you had any leanings towards Mormonism, you would never withstand their wiles."

He spoke with the strong feeling of one who had escaped from much evil and suffering.

"But I dislike their cant," said Thora. "It robs them of any charm for me. I think I should have been strong enough, even if I knew less, and came to Utah in total ignorance."

As she spoke, she remembered that all Mormons were not like Sidney Sharp and Clara Young. What of Ezra Dyer, who preached the faith, and won the complete devotion of her life? She felt a fresh interest in Mr. Crane and his experiences. She urged him to tell her more of these people whose lives had filled him with such horror.

"I remember," he said, "two Mormon servant girls, who stayed at a dance till the early hours of the morning with some of

the most questionable characters in Utah. I knew the kind of dance they had attended, and asked them how they reconciled their conduct with the deep religious feelings they outwardly professed. I was calmly told by one, that 'it was quite all right, because Elder Marsh led in prayer, before he began to call off the cotillons.' The other declared her soul was perfectly safe, as she had promised to go on the morrow to the Endowment House, to be sealed to an old white haired Mormon, who would be pledged to waken her to immortality in the future world, so that she might live for ever as his wife!"

"I can't understand why the women uphold polygamy," declared Thora. "If they all revolted, the practice would cease."

Cosmo Crane turned his eyes in the direction of a distant figure standing in solitude, gazing across the limitless expanse of ocean, the upright form of Mrs. Sidney Sharp. She was staring at the foam, which smiled across breaking waves as they danced in the sunlight.

"When a woman is on a doomed ship," he said, "and finds it has begun to sink, she has little choice but to face the inevitable. The only covering these enslaved polygamous wives can find to save their reputation, is to wave the flag of their strange faith, which provides them with an excuse, and some claim to decency. All that is dear to

the feminine soul has gone, unless they are skilful in the art of diplomacy. By boasting of their religious convictions, they strive to avoid the deep abyss of degradation."

He still watched Kate, as if the sight of her held for him some gloomy and mysterious attraction.

"Poor Mrs. Sharp does not see much of her husband, though they are so recently married. He seems already to have turned his attentions to another," said Thora, aware that later on the clergyman's words might apply to Sidney's wife.

"Can you be surprised? Her husband's creed unhinges the whole of the domestic and social machinery. Divorce is so easy in Utah, that the people hardly stop for the formality, if they wish to re-arrange their marital relations. A man before now has been known to marry his bride's mother and grandmother, while one Mormon, to my certain knowledge, was 'sealed' to three sisters in one day. Women are allowed by the Church to leave laymen for Elders, and Elders for Bishops, because, you see, their grade in the next world is supposed to depend on the husband's rank in this life."

Thora thought of a female serpent which had undoubtedly crept into Kate's Eden.

"That young woman, Clara, who is always with Sidney Sharp, never ceases to boast of her illustrious relative, Brigham Young."

Mr. Crane shrugged his shoulders with an exclamation of disgust.

"He was the worst enemy to your sex that ever raised a voice of power. He preached openly in his huge tabernacle the creed that it was cheaper to get a wife than a cow, and men were fools who did not make their women work. 'If they kick,' he said, 'lash 'em down to it; if one dies now and again, no great harm is done.' His will was law, and the law in his day never inquired into such a trifling matter as a man killing his wife. It is well known that an old Mormon, who went on a proselyting tour, 'blood atoned' his youngest wife on his return, by cutting her throat from ear to ear. She was the latest addition to his harem, a girl young enough to be his grandchild. The other wives, angry because he had given her some presents, made much of a little handkerchief flirtation she indulged in with a Gentile boy. They succeeded in rousing the husband's jealousy, and revenge was swift. He called together his mob of children and wives, then, taking the unwary young creature on his knee, informed her, after a short sermon on wrong doing, that it was his sacred duty to redeem her soul. He took out his hunting knife as he spoke, and in a moment she guessed her sentence of death had been passed. She tried to struggle, to escape, but he held her fast and the blood from her severed head be

spattered the children who crawled at his feet. Without ceremony, he threw her body into a hole he had dug in the orchard, and stamped down the dirt on her face, as he had stamped out that budding life."

Thora turned very pale, and for a moment she pressed her hand over her heart, looking towards Kate Sharp.

"Forgive me," murmured Mr. Crane, "if my rather unguarded talk has unnerved you. I was wondering if any business could repay you for visiting Utah, under the protection of your Mormon friends. Would it not be possible to turn back, and drop them out of your life for ever? It seems a great impertinence for me, an absolute stranger, to dare to offer advice, but I happen to know so much about these people. Mormonism can masquerade in gala dress, and appear quite attractive to strangers, who do not realise the rottenness beneath their outward veneer."

"I am not thinking of myself," replied Thora. "I'm thinking of that misguided woman, standing over there alone. She told me an untruth the other day. She said she was perfectly happy, her face belied the words. I shall try to get beneath the surface, and break down her wall of reserve. After all, she is an Englishwoman—a Londoner—a sister."

An expression of deep sympathy softened Thora's eyes. The clergyman thought he

had never seen a more emotional face, for the features, which could look hard and set, now melted to tenderness at the realisation of another's pain. She sprang to her feet, eager to carry out the good intention towards Kate Sharp, without delay.

"Perhaps you could help her," he said. "Think of the One Who pronounced those comforting words: 'Neither do I condemn thee.' To wretched, polygamous wives, with aching hearts, there must surely be a way of escape in the message: 'Go in peace, and sin no more.' When Mrs. Sharp has unmasked all the hideous secrets of her husband's religion, and become a broken hearted and desolate woman, she may escape from the chains of polygamy, and find salvation in the pure teaching of a higher gospel. Do all in your power, you will get your reward."

He raised his hat, as Thora moved away, with a grateful smile for his hopeful words. He watched her join the lonely figure, saw her lay a friendly hand upon Mrs. Sharp's arm, noting the look of surprise on the face of the married woman, as she felt the sisterly touch.

Together they strolled out of sight, but he fancied Thora was speaking eagerly, and that her companion responded with emphasis, and even passion. He wondered not a little what passed between the two.



CHAPTER XIX

"AS YOU WILL, HUSBAND"

THORA found it an easy task to break through Mrs. Sharp's reserve. A few tactful words of friendship and sympathy drew from Kate's sore heart a confession of her loneliness and fear.

"Of course," she said, "you must see, day by day, how it is with me. Who would think I was a bride? That girl, Clara Young, takes good care to monopolise my husband, and her Mormon beliefs are getting on my nerves. Naturally, she sees I am a Mormon in name only. You must have guessed as much yourself."

"I did not think you were head over ears in love with their methods and doctrines," replied Thora, assuming a cheerfulness she was far from feeling, "but let us hope it will not raise a barrier between you and your husband. Don't you think you might hint to Clara that after all you are practically a honeymoon couple still, and would like to be left to yourselves?"

Kate sighed, as she mentally reviewed the situation.

"It's very difficult to argue with a

young woman who has been trained in the Mormon beliefs from infancy. She thinks the road to celestial glory lies in the multiplying of wives and children. She is always declaring that Christ will come, when the incarnation of spirits shall cease. She tells me that in every community there are religious schools for Mormon children, as their religion may not be taught in public schools, though it is secretly preached in many by Mormon teachers. Night and day I rack my brains asking myself:—‘How can I keep my husband true?’ Do you know, by a refinement of cruelty, it is their law that, if Sidney took another wife, I should have to go through the Endowment House with them, and put the woman’s hand into my husband’s? A vision of this scene has become a waking nightmare, and raises such evil passions in my heart that I feel capable of anything. I thought you despised me for bearing his name, but when you spoke kindly just now, and held my hand, I—well—I just wanted to cry—only there were so many people about.”

Her voice broke, shaken by a sob, though her tearless eyes stared with a strange fixed gaze on the vast expanse of ocean, as they had often done of late.

“You are in a very difficult position,” said Thora, with a world of feeling in her voice. “If I can help you, I will, but, of course, I know how impossible it is to turn

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a Mormon from his beliefs. His cousin tried to escape, his cousin died—you know that only too well—perhaps from very fear."

Kate Sharp laughed—a hard, jarring sound, without a note of mirth—more painful and heartrending than any cry.

"I shouldn't attempt to turn Sidney from Mormonism. I might as well try to change the tide of this sea beneath us. After all, he must live his religion. I married with my eyes open. I was a foolish girl; his money dazzled me, and the work at the hospital was hard."

She spoke now in a hopeless voice, which gave Thora an insight into the weariness of her soul, disillusioned already, before she had even set foot on American soil.

"You mustn't despair or grow morbid," said the girl, who had tasted the bitterness of life. "It is early days to lose heart and spirit. Where is your husband now? Why not seek him out, and show him what a good companion you can be?"

"You are right," murmured Kate, smiling with an effort. "I have grown morbid—I am always brooding. He is reading a pamphlet to Clara Young, on Mormon politics, they are absolutely one in all their views and aspirations. I will go and pretend to be interested. Sidney would like it, and Clara would not like it—that's some satisfaction."

Thora looked pleased. At least, Kate

had some spirit left.

"I will come with you, and draw Miss Young away. She has been trying for some time to get me to herself to talk of her religion, but I snubbed her so severely she was obliged to give it up."

"She is terribly anxious about your spiritual state, and greatly desires to be sealed to some saint as your proxy, for then you would not be shut out of the Kingdom of Heaven," whispered Kate, in a voice that held a world of sarcasm and smothered hatred.

"I am afraid she will be disappointed, but I mean to give her a chance of trying to convert me to-day. While I am listening to her cant, you have a serious conversation with Mr. Sharp. I am sure he would behave differently, if he knew he was making you miserable."

"Do you think so?"

The words were uttered eagerly. The speaker looked more like Nurse Baker of old, as the set lips relaxed. Thora had given her hope, and courage for fresh action.

They moved away together, the girl who had loved an Elder, and the woman who had married into Mormonism, with a new sense of sympathy between them in the thought of their mutual suffering, and in the strange circumstances which threw them together.

"There's just one thing I want to say,"

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whispered Kate a little shyly, as they came in sight of Clara and Mr. Sharp. "I'm so sorry I was rude to you about your friend, Mr. Kelly, that day in the train. He is one of the nicest men I ever met, but I was the mouthpiece of Sidney, you know. I had to act as I did."

"Of course ; I understood. I had quite forgotten the incident," said Thora.

The Mormon couple looked up, surprised to see Mrs. Sharp and Miss Sutton arm in arm. The pamphlet lay closed on Clara's lap, and she willingly accepted Thora's invitation to come for a walk up and down the deck.

Kate took the empty seat beside her husband, and put out a detaining hand to prevent him rising also.

Clara waved her small white fingers to Sidney as she tripped off with Thora. She liked to be seen with Miss Sutton, and seized the opportunity of discussing the Mormon's bride.

"Poor Mrs. Sharp," she sighed, "I fear she is still something of a stranger to our Church teaching, but I hope in time she will receive its sacred mysteries through the power of revelation."

"You mean, that so far she can see no beauty in the doctrine of polygamy?"

"You're mighty sharp on the point, Miss Sutton. By the way, I didn't intend that as a play on your friend's name. It

strikes me you have a good deal of the American in you, for all you're so soft voiced and quiet. You can see through a brick wall with the spyglass of intuition."

"Perhaps. I have had good training in the school of adversity."

Thora spoke coldly, it revolted her to be with Clara Young.

"But you will forget all your sorrows so soon as you set foot in Utah," continued the insinuating voice. "Its social side is equal to its natural capacities. We have a saying, 'Touch it with water, tickle it with a hoe, and it laughs in harvests.' As to its mineral beds, they are the richest on the continent, and perhaps in the world. You couldn't own property in a better part of the United States, and since it all comes to you direct from a Mormon Elder, you should at least feel some sympathy with our movement."

"The movement of polygamy?"

Clara gnashed her teeth impatiently, it was one of her little mannerisms

"Dear me, how you do harp on that word, Miss Sutton! Still, I'm not quarrelling with it, since polygamy is the salvation of women. You know every man becomes a god when he joins the Mormon Church, and we have to be saved through them. When a woman has eventually gained immortality, she will be a reigning queen over the wives she has helped her husband to marry. If

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Mrs. Sharp could only grasp this teaching, she would not be in such a fright of her husband taking other wives. She must know that the more he marries, the greater his godhood, and the higher her queenship. The increase of the family goes on after death, for ever, so, through the small sacrifice of sharing her husband's love now, she will reap her reward throughout eternity."

Thora felt her blood boil. She could not conceal her hot indignation as she replied :—

"To believe that, you have to be brought up a Mormon."

"If Mrs. Sharp could not accept our creed, she had no right to marry an Elder of our Church."

"I would rather say he had no right to marry her. He is a man of the world, he must have known he could not make her happy."

"On the contrary, he was mistaken in her. He thought she had sufficient intelligence to know that, as love increases with married life, the nature develops, so that the husband can cherish more than one wife. All the wives, and all the children, should love each other with Christian affection. Nothing so widens character as a polygamous family. It makes children unselfish, and in rightly ordered families, the wives feel like sisters to each other. The men don't always want to take more than one wife, but they

do it from a sense of duty, and for righteousness' sake."

Thora could no longer endure her companion's conversation. She wheeled round, and faced Clara with a haughty air.

"I would rather not hear any more of your disgusting views. To people who are not Mormons they are most loathsome and repulsive. I wanted to get you away from Mr. Sharp, because his wife was longing for a few quiet words with him. You have not even the good taste to leave her alone with her bridegroom."

Thora spoke with the loathing she could not conceal, and Clara's bright eyes flashed danger signals of wrath, as she listened to the disdainful words, flung at her in a moment of temper.

"You're mighty sure of your ground, Miss Sutton," she said, with a bitter laugh. "But remember, pride comes before a fall, and since we are speaking so candidly, I may as well remind you, that but for Mormon money, you would be a beggar to-day. You are not too proud to inherit a Mormon's fortune, though you defile with words the Church he loved, until your sinful wiles tore him from his great purpose, so that he died unsaved. On you the curse will fall, and he laughs longest who laughs last. In spite of popular hatred, and legal efforts, this Mormonism you pretend to despise goes right

on, rapidly progressing, strengthened by the hand of God."

"Why not boast of your strength in another name, and leave God out of it altogether?" suggested Thora, so quietly now, that her dignified calm made Clara's shrill voice sound vulgar and ineffective. "To you it may seem sacred, to us, whom you call 'the heathen,' it is the degradation of men and women, a curse to childhood, and absolutely destructive to family happiness. The very fact that you cloak such practices under the name of religion, disgusts an outsider, and makes the theory more infamous and criminal. Your leaders are forced to rely upon secrecy and deceit, to evade the law of the land. You cannot deny this."

Thora did not wait for any justification, but turned her back on the indignant figure of Brigham Young's descendant, and walked away with head held high, and a sense of suffocation, even in the wild free air of the high seas.

She passed Mr. and Mrs. Sharp without appearing to notice their presence. They were deep in conversation, and Sidney was gazing at his wife with the queer hypnotic look, which so often confused people.

"You think my love is waning, dear Kate," he was whispering softly, "but can you be surprised? You have an easy remedy in your hands. Make yourself one with me,

and I will be true, and cleave to you for ever."

"But are we not one?" she asked, in tones of surprise.

He shook his head.

"You still hold back from the faith. You refuse to be washed clean from the blood of this generation, in order that your members may be prepared for lively service in the way of all true saints. Can you deny that, for some unholy or selfish motive, you ask to be excused from the sacred mysteries of the Endowment House? I tell you candidly, unless you are prepared to go through the ceremonies like a devout Mormon, I can never really love you."

"But I thought you said I could be saved through a believing husband," gasped Kate, surprised at this new turn of events.

"It is not sufficient if you would really bind yourself to me with the cords of a lasting affection," declared Sidney sternly. "It depends whether you value my constancy and devotion, for if you hold back, you may drive me into the arms of another."

He spoke with hidden meaning. His wife read his thoughts. Simultaneously, a vision of Clara's face, triumphant, flitted before Kate's imagination. She felt at that moment she would do anything to regain her supremacy over her husband, to force aside the rival whose presence turned her every thought to gall.

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"I did not know," she faltered, "that you set such store on the outward rites. I am only anxious to please you, and keep you to myself. I, as an Englishwoman, claim my privileges to hold my position alone as your wife."

Kate reared her head proudly. She felt glad they were coming to an understanding.

"Then go through the Endowment ceremonies," he repeated in slow, calculating tones, pressing her hand as he spoke, till she winced with the pain of his grip. "That is all I ask."

She bowed her head in assent. She dared not refuse, with Clara looming on the horizon of her future.

"As you will, husband," she whispered, fervently.

"I want you to take your proper position in Mormon society," he added, in tones of relief. "We must make arrangements as soon as possible after you arrive."

He smiled at her with the old look she had not seen since they left England. Once more, life held a rosier aspect. What did it matter, the initiation, if by enduring it she kept this man faithful and loving? She had no religion, he might have asked some greater sacrifice. After all, it seemed an easy way of chaining him to her side.

Later in the day, she cheerfully told Thora that things were much better between Sidney and herself, and he had paid no

further attention to Clara. It mystified Thora to note that, under the circumstances, Miss Young wore a peculiarly self-satisfied and contented air. Occasionally, a secret glance passed between her and the Mormon Elder, who now ostentatiously devoted himself to the wife he had previously neglected.

"There is a purpose in it all, I feel convinced," Thora said to Howard Kelly, "but what their game is I could not possibly guess."

"Intriguers, every one of them," he answered. "Schemers to their finger tips. I fear Mrs. Sidney Sharp cannot escape from the tragedy of her Mormon prison. Her husband, and Clara Young, are drawing some unseen net around her to bind her fast in Utah. She has sold her youth and womanhood to the devil, and the devil generally makes a pretty good bargain for himself!"



CHAPTER XX

THE INITIATION CEREMONY

THORA suggested taking up her quarters at one of the big hotels in Salt Lake City, but Mrs. Sharp entreated her to stay with them at the house Sidney had prepared for the reception of his bride.

During the remaining days of the voyage, the sudden friendship between the entrapped wife of a Mormon, and the free English girl, developed rapidly. Kate had nothing in her personality to attract Thora, only pity, with its kinship to love, overruled all her thoughts, where the unfortunate woman was concerned.

Howard Kelly strongly advised Thora to part company with the Sharps, and conduct her business from an independent residence. He even hinted there was danger in a so-called "heathen" residing in a Mormon home. But Thora had no fear for her own safety. She ignored the fact that she must undoubtedly be the object of Mormon hatred, having drawn an Elder from his faith and inherited the money they coveted for their Church and community.

Mrs. Sharp pressed upon her the finest apartment in the house, saying she was

honoured by the presence of one of her own countrywomen, and that Sidney was most anxious she should provide for Thora's comfort in every way.

"He boasts his people are noted for their hospitality to the stranger within their gates," she told Thora. "He is eager to show you the sights of the city, and especially the tabernacle. I really believe he cherishes a hope you will be converted, and spend your life among the Mormons, whom, he declares, will own all the property of the country in time. Their streets will be paved with gold dug by Gentiles from the Rocky Mountains, insects which are noxious will be banished, and contagious diseases flourish no more. In the New Jerusalem, flowers, fruit, and grain shall abundantly increase, and any of the Gentile world, remaining undestroyed by the hand of God, are to become the servants of the Saints. Now, Miss Sutton, what can one make of a man who talks like that?"

Kate asked the question with a whimsical little smile. Thora answered lightly:—

"Listen, and say nothing. It would be quite useless to argue, and if he's happy thinking of his New Jerusalem in Salt Lake, it is a harmless form of pleasure after all."

Certainly, Nurse Baker of the Devonshire Street Home was hardly recognisable in the fashionably clad hostess of a magnificent house.



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For the moment, she forgot her dread in the novelty of possession. Together, she and Thora visited the tabernacle under Sidney's chaperonage. Thora, who knew it well from Ezra's description, felt strangely near to him as she entered the portals. Surely, in the spirit world he must feel that she was standing on the ground he had held so sacred, and loved dearly. He was beside her in the shadows; he watched over her, and she fancied she saw him again in the majesty of his last sleep.

"It is modelled on Solomon's temple," said Sidney Sharp, as he pointed out the splendours of the gigantic building, with an air of pride well justified by the supreme magnificence around him. On every side, ebony, marble, and alabaster met the eye.

"The precious stones which stud the door," he added, "have been sent from Africa, South America, and all parts of the world, from faithful Mormon converts."

He led the way to a main court, at the far end of which stood twelve life-sized gilded oxen, holding the big baptismal font.

"I have seen," he continued, "hundreds of white robed figures grouped around the font, waiting to be baptised. The whole place is built to give a suggestion on earth of celestial glory. We hope that no one can even pass through the building without feeling better."

"It is certainly very impressive," mur-

mured Thora. "The size alone takes one's breath away.

She felt again, as she spoke, the nearness of a fourth, unseen, presence.

Now she was following Mr. and Mrs. Sharp through a series of connecting rooms, gazing at the painted walls, representing various stages of development, from the unregenerate days before Joseph Smith, to the highest Mormon Heaven, to which only followers of the Prophet can attain.

"I may not show you the Endowment House," declared Sidney, regretfully, "since it would be profaned by the entry of a Gentile. It is there the secret rites of Mormonism are performed, with which my wife will be fully acquainted in a few days. She is to pass through in company with some other converts, and I trust it may have a lasting impression for good upon her life."

Kate exchanged a look with Thora which conveyed she had her doubts upon the subject.

Later, he expressed his sorrow that Miss Sutton's spirits were still too low for a visit to the theatre, which he described as "the institution of Salt Lake City."

"I am taking my dear Kate there to-night," he said, as their guest, in her quiet garb of mourning, refused the warm invitation. "It is a magnificent house, seats over two thousand people, and comes second only in interest to Social Hall, the Seventies'



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Hall, and the Court House. Brigham had a royal box there, which he used to occupy with the beautiful Amelia, and later it was frequently filled by his dashing daughters, with their many admirers."

Thora noticed the glitter of Sidney's steel-like eye as he mentioned Brigham. Was he thinking of Clara? Did he hope to follow in the footsteps of her illustrious relative?

"You must not neglect Miss Sutton," he added, turning to Kate, "except when your religious duties demand your absence. She is our honoured guest, and I wish her to enjoy every moment of her visit."

Thora protested she was perfectly happy when left to her own devices. She had arranged to see her property with Mr. Kelly, who was helping her in many business affairs. If her presence proved a drag upon her hostess, she should at once remove to a hotel.

The very hint of departure had the effect of exciting Sidney, and heightening his attitude of hospitality and appreciation.

"We are proud to have you with us," he declared warmly. "Already numerous acquaintances have asked me the name of the beautiful English lady, who has been seen driving with my wife. Make all your own plans, but give us the pleasure of entertaining you so long as business, or inclination, keeps you at Salt Lake. We will make

some excursions to the outlying districts, for we want you to see everything before you return to England."

Thora wondered if her mind were growing warped, for instinctively she found herself seeking a hidden meaning in Elder Sharp's outward kindness. She could believe no good of him, and felt convinced that time would reveal his true character. Meanwhile, she remained outwardly civil, but kept her host at a distance, and told him little of her affairs.

As the day approached for Kate to be initiated into the deeper mysteries of her husband's religion, Thora noticed she wore a strained expression, and was sometimes so absent-minded, that she broke off in the middle of a sentence, or left a direct question unanswered. New lines were visible on her forehead, and about her mouth—lines of anxiety which aged her considerably.

"I feel," she said, on the morning of the ordeal, "that I am not really a Mormon yet, but to-night I shall be bound hand and foot, or rather, I should say, body and soul, by Sidney's creed. It is my only chance of keeping his love, and a woman can rule a man in no other way. He has behaved so well ever since I promised to fall in with his wishes, that I cannot regret having decided to take this step, to give him pleasure and religious ease."

Thora watched her go, with a heavy



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dread of coming tragedy, feeling this move might be the first to lead her friend down to an abyss of treachery and horror. Kate seemed to her like an unsuspecting lamb being led to slaughter, as she drove away.

Sidney accompanied his wife to the Endowment House, where she joined the other white robed candidates. He told her little of the ceremony, saying she had only to follow her sisters in the faith, and the Lord would watch over them.

The majority of these so-called "sisters" were women of no personal distinction, with rather cowed faces, and vacant eyes of a watery blue. Light, colourless hair seemed a racial mark, and they wore none of the assurance characteristic of American citizens. They made her think of sheep in a pen, or cows driven to market, and her blood suddenly boiled to think that she, British-born, with her intelligence trained to the strenuous work of hospital and nursing home, should find herself in a position so ridiculous and degrading.

Removing her shoes in obedience to instruction, she set her lips, and followed the attendants with the rest of that human cowherd.

With noiseless step and measured tread, their guides led them to the central ante-room, a hall separated by screens from two other apartments, one for men, the other for women.



A deep and awe-inspiring silence prevailed, which she realised might wield a powerful influence over the minds of religiously disposed candidates. The mysterious attendants looked almost unearthly in the light of the dim room, darkened by heavy shades. It was easy to note that the ignorant women beside her were nervous and expectant, and their very attitude robbed Kate Sharp of any sensation save contempt and disgust.

The few moments of solemn waiting over, a female helper led the women to the washing-room on the left. Kate managed to keep behind the others, who were eager to press forward, and be the first to receive the special blessing and anointing. As the woman in charge disrobed the candidates one by one, and washed them from head to foot in the presence of their companions, a strong, almost overwhelming, sense of rebellion, warned Mrs. Sharp she was still the high spirited Nurse Baker of old. Should she refuse to subject herself to the indignity of this cleansing, decline to be bathed like a pauper in a common bath? She thought of Sidney's fortune, and the palatial home over which she reigned, and the memory forced her to cry down her pride. Already the washer's hands were upon her, and she was being pushed towards the small foot-bath in which the others had stood. Firmly gripping her head, the washer poured oil



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on her hair from a horn, at the same time uttering a blessing in reverent accents :—

“ Sister, I wash your head, that it may be prepared for that crown of glory awaiting you as a faithful Saint, and the fruitful wife of a priest of the Lord, that your brain may be quick in discernment, and your eyes able to perceive the truth, and avoid the snares of the enemy. May your mouth show forth the praise of the immortal gods, and your tongue pronounce the true name which will admit you hereafter behind the veil, and by which you will be known in the celestial kingdom. I wash your arms to labour in the cause of righteousness, and your hands to be strong in building up the Kingdom of God by all manner of profitable works. I wash your knees on which to prostrate yourself to humbly receive the truth from God’s holy priesthood, your feet to stand firm upon the appointed places, and now I pronounce you clean from the blood of this generation, and your body an acceptable temple for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.”

After those final words, which seemed to mock her with their outward purity, dressed in a close fitting garment reaching from neck to heels, she passed to another apartment, a new name being whispered in her ear, for use only in the Kingdom of God. In this new room, with a congregation of awestruck fanatical people, strangers to her

in every thought and feeling, she witnessed a strange play, intoned in blank verse, representing the successive steps in the creation of the world. Adam and Eve appeared, and soon the devil, dressed in a tightly fitting suit of black velvet, obtruded his presence on the pair. The fate of Eve, accompanied by the eating of the fruit, brought forth Jehovah's curse, and Satan, a fine actor in his way, sank upon the ground, with hisses, finally to be kicked out by the Apostle Peter, who made a sudden appearance, accompanied by a mimic St. James and St. John.

After this ribald scene, the initiates were ranged in order, to listen to a lecture. As the words of the speaker fell on Kate Sharp's ears, she fancied she saw, as Thora had done, the white face of Ezra Dyer, the ex-Mormon, lying dead in the Devonshire Street room. She wondered why he rose to haunt her now, when she most needed to keep her mind clear and calm.

"Brethren and sisters," spoke the commanding voice, "light is now come into the world, and the way of righteousness is open. The devil and his angels desire to sift you like wheat, but are baffled because the holy priesthood is established through the successors of Joseph Smith. To this priesthood, as unto Christ, all respect is due, implicit obedience, yielding to the laws without murmur, since the followers of our Prophet



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alone have the power to seal. You are to obey all orders of the priesthood, temporal and spiritual, in matters of life and death. Submit yourselves as a tallowed rag in the hands of God's priesthood, knowing they are divinely endowed, and must therefore be obeyed as the Incarnate Voice of God. Join hands now, and kneel in a circle, slowly repeating from my lips an oath, after which you will be placed one by one on the holy altar, and stretched at full length upon the back, while the officiating priest draws a knife across your throats, in the semblance of cutting. If any are false at heart, the Spirit will reveal it to their certain death."

He looked with piercing eyes at the faces of the candidates. Some trembled, while others drew themselves up with a sense of elation, at the thought that their faith would thus be proved.

Nurse Baker listened, a traitor in every fibre of her being, for she could no longer bear to think she owned the name of Sharp. Her hospital training robbed her of a woman's ordinary fear at the sight of a knife in close proximity to human flesh, she knew she would not falter, she could act sufficiently to ensure her safety. Unmoved, she watched her fellow "saints" pass the ordeal, some so pale she thought they would have fainted, others murmuring aloud professions of their belief. With a stern, set face, Kate laid herself upon the altar, much as she had seen

many a patient mount, without trembling, the operating table, and watched with disdain the brawny hand that flourished an immense brightly edged razor within an inch of her throat.

"Fool," she muttered under her breath, "to think you can frighten me with your mummery."

Once more she regained her feet, ready to repeat another oath of fidelity, the breaking of which meant instant death, agonising details being given, in all their graphic horror, by the man of God, who seemed to take a fiendish pleasure in the undignified attitudes of the women on the altar.

"Each of you," cried the voice of the priest, "has passed under the Searching Hand, and the Spirit of the Lord has decided for His Own. If a false brother or sister had come to this ordeal, and entered with evil intent, the council of the gods would have decreed their instant destruction. Go forth, ye blessed ones, and testify to the Saints."

Kate Sharp looked straight at the speaker, and her white lips moved, but without sound. He caught the glance, and noted the quivering of her mouth. He saw high courage in her face, which he did not detect as rebellion.

"A godly woman," he murmured, "gathered from the Gentile world to repose in the bosom of the only true and apostolic



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body. But for Elder Sharp, she would have groaned throughout eternal ages in the bottomless pit, devoured for ever and ever by the sulphurous flames of hell, wherein the soul of Ezra Dyer is doubtless languishing, unless the righteous action of his brother in Christ has saved him by atonement. Blessed be the hand that cut off a faithless member from the earth! Amen! amen!"

He watched Kate out of sight, marking well her upright figure, the shade of her hair, and the moulding of her features.

She knew his eye followed her—knew it, and sickened, every womanly instinct resenting the unspoken insult of his gaze.

The other candidates wondered why he smiled. They only saw in his face the light of heaven, where the Englishwoman discerned the lurid fires which ripen men for hell.



CHAPTER XXI

GLORIES OF POLYGAMY

AFTER the vows she had taken, with their accompanying threats of death to traitors, Kate dared not confess to her husband the awful loathing she felt towards everything in connection with the Mormon faith. To do so would be to put a weapon in his hands, should he desire to get her out of the way, and clear the path for Clara, with whom she knew he daily corresponded. As yet, however, her rival had not obtruded herself upon their home life. Sidney explained to Kate it was no lack of courtesy on Miss Young's part, but she so disliked Miss Sutton, that she preferred to remain away for the present, and would call when their guest returned to England.

On the evening of the Endowment ceremonies, Sidney made much of his wife, spending many hours alone with her in a quiet boudoir upstairs, and talking of the great spiritual benefits she had received.

"My precious child!" he murmured, drawing her head upon his shoulder, "now we are truly united, one soul and one body for time and eternity. Thank Heaven, I can

love you at last with all the power of my being, knowing you are in a saved condition, and will go steadily on in the way of light. You are dearer to me a thousand times for to-day's progress. You can't realise what a relief it is to be able to speak to you freely, to feel you are one of us, sworn to further the working of the Church. I can tell you henceforth of all the secret duties I am pledged to perform. One solemn oath I took was to bear undying hostility to the United States Government, for the murder of our Prophet and martyr, Joseph Smith. I am bound, if possible, to avenge his death, and to do all in my power to help towards the overthrow of the Government. Should I fail in fidelity to the Degree of the Melchizedek Priesthood, which has been conferred upon me, the penalty is to have the heart torn out—to feed the fowls of the air."

Kate shuddered at the calm manner in which he related these disclosures, without a trace of agitation or horror, as if indeed he were discussing the ordinary affairs of life.

"I suppose I have much to learn yet," she said, with well feigned humility. "Tell me about the doctrine of Blood Atonement, which is a mystery to me still."

She kept her eyes on the ground, sitting with clasped hands, and meek demeanour. She knew the doctrine had been evolved from that furnace of passions, the fertile imagina-

tion of Brigham Young, and desired to draw Sidney on to reveal secrets of bloodshed. He fell readily into the trap.

"For incorrigible Gentiles and apostates from the Church," he replied, "Blood Atonement is the only way by which we can secure their eternal exaltation. To atone for sins, their spilt blood ascends as a smoking incense to Heaven. You may be able to place a case before your mind at this minute, where a defaulting Mormon was ordered to be slain, in the blessed hope that he might have some chance of a final resurrection."

She clasped her hands tightly, her breath came in quick gasps.

"You mean Ezra Dyer," she said, controlling her voice with an effort. "You murdered him that night in the Nursing Home. You thought you would save his soul that way."

The suspicion had lain in her heart unuttered till this moment.

Sidney Sharp nodded. The initiation ceremony made it possible for him to be open with his wife.

"Unfortunately, I could not spill his blood, it was too dangerous, so I was obliged to adopt another method of wiping him off the face of the earth. In that case, certainly, I loved my neighbour as myself, for I risked my own life to help him, and to obey the dictates of my Church."

Suddenly, fresh knowledge came to Kate,



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as she remembered an incident of the past.

"You smothered him with my cushion. The teeth marks are on it yet," she whispered. "I have often wondered at them since, thinking perhaps rats had been in my room."

She saw it all now, the hideous truth flashed across her in its rude reality. She wondered how she managed to frame the words in such an unemotional tone.

"The Saints, you see, are compelled to execute the law of God upon persons worthy of death," he replied coolly. "I began the slow poisoning even before he left this city. I betrayed him to the Brethren, who sent me as his guard, for I had sworn to build up the Kingdom of the Lord, and to destroy transgressors."

With a thrill of horror, Kate re-called Sidney's feigned misery on the night of the death. Well she remembered leading him sobbing to a couch, while frightened patients awoke to hear the wailing of the bereaved. It repelled her to know the woman who had loved Ezra Dyer was a guest beneath his murderer's roof. That was the worst of all—the thought that Thora was here, eating bread with the man who had ruined her life.

"Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit must be hewn down," continued the self-satisfied voice. "Blood Atonement was proclaimed by the infallible revelators of Mormonism, and our system teaches absolute submission of body, soul, and spirit

to the priesthood. If ever a man was worthy of death, it was Ezra Dyer."

Sidney rubbed his hands together, and settled himself more comfortably in a low arm chair. Kate had heard much of the past history of the Mormons, and she now re-called their early barbarities—the Mountain Meadow Massacre in 1857, when, by order of a high council of the Church, two hundred men, women, and children were savagely butchered, and their goods divided among Mormon officials. This, with the murder of the Morrisites, and the slaughter in the valley of the Rio Virgin, all proved their belief in the doctrine that unbelievers must be destroyed. How was it then, she asked herself, that Thora's presence gave him such pleasure? He must hate her, as he hated Ezra Dyer. Possibly he was also plotting against her life.

"Is it not rather hypocritical," she suggested timidly, "to show civility to Miss Sutton, when, if she knew all, she would surely never look upon your face again? Does it not make you feel miserable to touch her hand in greeting? We had better let her go, it can't be right for her to stay here."

"Dear, simple child," laughed Sidney. "Did you really imagine I looked upon her as anything but my most deadly foe? I see your mind needs training in the art of diplomacy, but I fancy under my guidance



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you will soon develop into a most sensible and helpful woman. I want you to grasp the principles of my religion, which are all founded on immediate revelation from God. One of the chief doctrines revealed is that of celestial—or plural marriage.”

The colour fled from Kate's face. She looked at him with stern cold eyes.

“You said if I went through the Endowment ceremonies, you would remain true to me for ever.”

“Certainly, my love, certainly. Do not disturb yourself. This vital part of our faith, in no way makes us untrue. I shall cherish and honour you to the day of my death, but pray realise that polygamy is still an essential part of our creed. I could not let your narrow views change my belief, and if I were to deny this part of my faith I should, at the same time, be denying our Prophet, Joseph Smith. Sooner than utter a word against his teaching, I would have my tongue torn from its roots. Plural marriage is an everlasting covenant. Since Utah gained statehood, we promised outwardly to abandon this part of our righteous system, and even now assert that we have done so, to shield the Saints from persecution, knowing well that those who denounce patriarchal marriage, will never walk the golden streets.”

At the first hint of this revolting doctrine, she knew all that was in his mind.

Clara Young was the coveted object of his desire, and to gain this end he had induced his English wife to bind upon her soul the chains of a despotic and cruel faith. She found herself listening to his smooth tones without even a sense of surprise.

What could she expect from an acknowledged murderer? The confession of his treachery to Ezra Dyer created such a violent revulsion of feeling in her soul, that she could almost imagine herself glad he was thinking of another woman. Through Clara, she might escape the presence of one who filled her with bitterest hatred and disgust. She knew that a violent spirit of evil had suddenly leaped to life in her heart, that on her would fall the task of avenging these wrongs, and betraying, if she dared, the hand which had robbed an innocent man of life. If Sidney were hypocrite, she would be hypocrite too. She had tasted the dregs of humiliation. She found herself bound to a fiend, who quoted Scripture in sanctimonious accents, a devil masquerading in the garb of a saint—such a position warranted a twin brain to scheme, sharpened by that special passion which is "cruel as the grave."

"Of course," she said, in excuse for her past attitude, "your marriages are founded on quite different principles from the Christian world."

He drew himself up with haughty pride,

and answered in self-righteous accents :—

"You cannot establish that assertion, for I hold our institutions do not differ from the Bible. We walk in the footsteps of the patriarchs, who obeyed God in regard to their marriage and family organisations. Through the glories of polygamy we attain the highest divinity hereafter. It is the ideal of human and eternal life."

Kate rose to her feet, and, with one hand pressed to her throat, moved slowly up and down the room, trying to collect her thoughts, and retain self-control. He watched her, wondering what she would say and do. When at last she addressed him, it was in a manner quite different to the one he had expected and feared.

"Would it not be better, instead of telling me all this, just to say plainly when, and where, and how, you intend making Clara Young your wife?"

"My clever darling," he gasped, relieved at her philosophical acceptance of facts, "you have guessed what I have been trying to tell you. I feared you hardly appreciated, on the voyage, the sterling qualities of that young woman. Now you have accepted the holy mysteries, your mind naturally travels along fresh lines, and you see the matter from a Mormon standpoint. Why, on occasions, it is even necessary to commit perjury on behalf of our Church! You must be sure not to let Miss Sutton, or Mr. Kelly,

know anything of my secret marriage with Miss Young, for whom I shall provide an establishment in another part of the town. If they ask questions, you must tell them lies, since the interests of the Church and the priesthood demand it of you. Such dealings with the heathen become a religious duty. Henceforth truth, to you, must mean that only to a brother or sister Mormon you must be true."

"I understand perfectly," murmured Kate, with widely opened eyes. "You have made it all so clear."

"You find me a good teacher, eh?"

"The best. It is impossible not to comprehend."

"We Mormons, you see, dear Kate, must defend one another in all things. As the Lord lives, to clear a brother, I would swear to anything, knowing I did God service. Should I fail in this part of my work, I would deserve to reap the painful kingdom of the lost. In Joseph Smith's day there was a 'death society' for the punishment of the obnoxious. The members were 'destroying angels,' pledged to purge the floor. They took to themselves spoils of the ungodly Gentiles, and thus enriched, were able to increase their number of wives. You must prepare your heart to obey instructions, for if you abide not by the covenant, you will indeed be damned."

As she listened, she traced in his every

word the very spawn of perdition. She shuddered inwardly, concealing with a mighty effort the disgust she felt in her heart.

"You have not yet told me if you've made any definite arrangements for your 'celestial marriage,' with Clara Young," she said.

Was it possible he did not trace the sneer on her lips, or the disdain in her voice? He was so engrossed with his own theories, he treated Kate as a mere puppet, willing to be moulded by his views and instructions, little guessing all that was passing in her quick woman's mind—in her broken woman's heart.

"I have set apart a day for the solemnisation of the marriage ceremony," he answered promptly. "Though secretly performed, Clara will invite a number of her friends and relatives, and of course you have to be present. I will instruct you beforehand in your simple duties. You may think that holding back would prevent the sacred ordinance. Be not deceived. Should a wife have no good reason to show why she refuses to comply with the law, it is lawful for her husband to be married without her consent, if permitted by revelation. I would be justified, and you would be condemned, if you failed to give Clara to me, as Rachel and Leah gave Bilhah and Zilpah to their husband Jacob."

He was guarding himself against possible

trouble. His wife's acquiescence seemed too good to be true.

"Have no fear, I shall be present," said Kate, calmly. "Why not go to your study now, and write and tell Clara what an amiable partner you have? Now she is made a Mormon, she can at last fully grasp all the details of your faith, as spake by the Prophet."

Sidney gladly followed her advice, for he knew this welcome attitude would bring relief to Clara's mind. He patted Kate's cheek, and whispered she was the dearest little woman in all the world.

She waited till the sound of his retreating feet died away along the corridor. Then she sank upon the ground, and stretched her arms, with clenched fists. A harsh, metallic laugh struggled for sound between her teeth, set with grim intensity, as if to stifle the utterance of a curse. She gazed upon the various objects in the room. Strangely enough, they all seemed shadowed in red, they floated in a sea of blood.

"There is a cup," she muttered, "more bitter than death. Be thankful, O Mormon Saint, that for a time you can enjoy your little day of triumph, without a thought that your 'willing wife' carries a viper in her bosom. Two can play the same game; two can scheme, plot, and humbug. Remember that, you lying old frog of an Elder! If you are possessed of one devil, I am

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possessed of ten. That's a bad look out, Sidney Sharp. Entreat your gods to come down through a cloud of blasphemy, and help you—if they can."

She laughed aloud now—grim snatches of caricatured mirth that broke from her throat like the ghost of evil thoughts, and faded away upon mists of crimson light, as they floated before her staring eyes.

CHAPTER XXII

THE DESTRUCTION OF A GENTILE

THE day of the wedding fixed, Kate showed no signs of hostility towards her husband, rather, she encouraged him to talk of future plans, especially in regard to the feelings of hatred he and his Mormon brethren cherished for Thora.

"It's no good thinking we shall ever win her to the faith," he said in private to his wife, in whom he now confided every criminal instinct of his heart, cloaked as ever by religious revelation. "She spends all her time in the company of her heathen friend, Howard Kelly, whom I understand she meets daily, though I do not invite him to my house. Now, as I have often explained to you, my dear, robbery from the Gentiles, and even murder, is accounted a virtue, since we are agents of the Lord, Who can take where He pleases, and pay as seemeth good. Whatever we do, according to the will of the Lord, is His business, and therefore a divine mission, in order that His Saints may be provided for in these last days, and obtain their inheritance in the land of Zion."

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"I quite understand the teaching," she murmured, lowering her eyes. "Go on."

"It is now the object of the Church, to gain back the large fortune Ezra willed away to the vile woman who planned the damnation of his soul. This might be achieved by a well thought out device, if Thora Sutton were to mysteriously disappear from the face of the earth. Would you consent to join hands with me in the matter, and work under the orders of the Latter Day Saints, to your eternal salvation?"

Kate drew a deep breath, her chest heaved, her colour came and went. Just for a moment she feared he must have seen her recoil, and she forced a smile quickly, to contradict the look of horror which had leapt to her eyes.

"Indeed," she replied, "I should esteem it an honour, to be the instrument of your godly work. Remember, as a hospital nurse, I do not fear the sight of death. If any deed of violence is to be done, let it come through me, that I may win a greater crown of glory."

Sidney grasped her hand, and pressed it affectionately.

"I see the blessed Spirit has descended upon you," he whispered, an expression of joy lighting his face. "I had hardly hoped you would thus freely offer your services. It will indeed assist matters, especially as you are not likely to lose your head at the

sight of a heathen's lifeless body gone to perdition."

Kate bowed her head assentingly. The sound of his little chuckle was peculiarly revolting.

"What is your plan of action? Speak low, for Miss Sutton might pass the door, and catch her name," said Mrs. Sharp, in a whisper, which only reached Sidney's ear.

"An easy way of destruction has been revealed to me through the message of an angel. You know the soothing and delicious drink you made for us the night after our arrival? I shall suggest (on the evening she is to be swept from the face of the earth), that your excellent brew might be repeated. You will, in answer to my request, rise from the table, and make haste to bring the glasses. In the one prepared for Miss Sutton you must add a large portion of laudanum, which will rob her of consciousness. Concealed in the adjoining room, will be a strong box, easily fastened down, to which you and I will carry her body. On a signal given from the window, some brethren, members of a society sworn to serve the 'Community' without question, even to the surrendering of their own lives if desired, shall noiselessly enter the house, and bear away their accursed burden to a place of destruction. The lid will snap down with a patent fastening, and never again open on this earth. Do you tremble at the task before you?"



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He fancied the Nurse Baker of old looked him full in the face, as his wife replied :—

"No, my profession in the past has given me a nerve of iron. I am ready to serve you with a light heart, and do all you ask, if in return you will grant me a request, just one small reward, to show you appreciate my work."

She put her head on one side, and raised her eyebrows with a little gesture that had always fascinated him. He saw the colour glowing in her cheeks, the slight pouting of her lips. He warmed towards her.

"Could I refuse you anything, my fair one, now that you are a true Mormon, and have proved your noble qualities?" he murmured in accents of love.

"Though a true Mormon," she continued, "I am still a woman, the one who gained your love in the far away city of London. I mean to hand Clara over to you on the wedding day with a smile on my face, and yet, I confess, it is a day of trial and strain for me. I should like to hold in my mind a diverting thought, to feel the fulfilment of a glorious purpose lay before us that very evening. Will you come at our dinner hour, alone, without your bride, and work the vengeance we have planned upon Miss Sutton? I shall tell her it is your birthday, and that I am preparing a special brew, in which to drink your health."

"Ah!" he laughed. "You women are

all alike—a little jealousy, eh, to lure me from Clara, so early in our married life ? ”

Kate drew nearer, with a caressing movement.

“ Think of her joy when you return, and recount what has been done to celebrate your nuptials. She hates Thora Sutton like poison, will she not rejoice at the triumph of the Saints ? You could tell her that pressing business in connection with the Church, calls you away for one short hour. She is too good a Mormon to demur. I doubt if I ask a very great sacrifice, considering all I am about to do for you.”

“ My sweetheart, wife, and treasure, I have ever been a lenient husband. You will not find me falling short of the mark now. If so it please your whim, the wedding day shall be a full one, celebrated at eve by the destruction of a Gentile. We must hold concourse together again, to arrange the minutest details of this righteous and daring deed. I place absolute confidence in you, as a woman of high courage, and a living example of holy endeavour to all Mormon wives. It pleases me to think of your queenship in the world to come, and the eternal benefits Heaven will bestow upon you for your splendid work. Now I am due to hold an interview with Clara’s father, he is anxious I should make a good settlement upon his daughter.”

He looked at his watch as he spoke,

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and moved to the door with a breezy laugh, and a wave of his claw-like hand. She smiled back at him with lips, eyes, and heart, —a smile of great triumph.

Not until he was out in the street, and she had watched him drive away from the window, did she fall on her knees, and, rocking herself backwards and forwards, give vent to hysterical sobs, and low inarticulate sounds, like the groaning of a dumb creature in pain.

CHAPTER XXIII

PAYING BACK

THORA was alone in her room, late at night, reading and answering her correspondence. She loved the solitude, and, feeling no inclination to sleep, sat down to write Mrs. Barcroft an account of her doings. She tried to imagine that Muriel was near, her spirit translated to the great silent house of Thora's host and hostess. Suddenly, the pen of the ready writer became a magic mouthpiece, drawing out the girl's true feelings, pinning them down to a simple sheet of notepaper.

"I seem to have lost my heaviness and sorrow, since reaching this beautiful city which Ezra loved," she wrote, "and oh! I am so glad at the loss. The ugly reality of life has suddenly slipped from me. Perhaps it is only mislaid. When I left you on that London platform, I was a dead woman to all the sweetest emotions of life. I carried bitterness and gall in my soul. You will say:—'I know it all before you tell me, you are in love again.' No, Muriel, love mounts to the everlasting heights, while friendship basks contentedly in the valley of pure satisfaction. I am now in the sunshine of that valley—at peace, since I

have found a friend. You gave him to me as a parting gift, he has shown me that I am not so dead but I can appreciate the loyal devotion of a true, unselfish heart. I am no nearer the mystery of my darling Ezra's end, and perhaps (though to myself I hardly acknowledge this), it is a relief. It will always be in my mind, at dawn and at eve, as I live and as I die, but I fancy now I shall not learn the secret until I myself have passed the veil. Again, I rejoice that the galling desire for revenge, which fills human nature with a pitiful brutality, a merciless unrest, is fading and fading, like a stormcloud before the conquering sun. I shall soon return to England, my financial business done, but my deeper mission buried happily in the grave of a not unwelcome failure. It is odd what change of scene can do, and the finding of a friend. I am coming back to try and revive my appreciation of life, to escape the bitter pains and penalties of an ill-fated past. Howard Kelly declares he will return in the same boat, so much the better for me."

A faint tapping at her door arrested Thora's pen. She answered "Come in," and looked up inquiringly.

A slim figure entered on tip-toe—the wasted form of Mrs. Sidney Sharp, clothed in a bed-room wrapper of gold embroidery, her feet encased in small gold slippers of

Eastern make. She wore her fair hair in two long plaits ornamented by yellow bows. Her face glowed with a strange eagerness, while her eyes were lighted by an almost furious intensity, which brought harshness to the features that once lacked character and strength.

"I thought you had gone to bed," said Thora. "Is anything the matter?"

Kate made a sign of assent, as she turned the key in the door, and drew close to her guest.

"You have thought, no doubt," she said, "that Sidney and I have been on terms of great affection lately. Can you guess what is to happen to-morrow?"

Her voice was low and laboured. She gazed apparently right through Thora, at some object of horror beyond.

A flash of intuition warned the girl that Clara's wiles had at last succeeded, but she dared not name her suspicion, merely shaking her head to feign ignorance.

"To-morrow," continued Kate, "my husband goes before the President with another woman, who is to be given to him as his 'lawful and wedded wife,' a secret ceremony, the revealing of which might cost me my life, if I were overheard."

She placed her lips to Thora's ear, to enable her to catch the whispered words. Instinctively, the girl put a protecting arm round Kate's shoulder, and folded her in a

close embrace, as if she would hold her from her fate.

"Oh! poor Mrs. Sharp," she murmured. "I dare not think what your feelings must be. What shall you do? Cannot it possibly be stopped?"

Kate shook her head.

"My sense of disgust and outrage at these so-called sacred laws and rites has been dulled by something greater than insult, and even more hideous than polygamy. The man whom I called my husband is worse than a libertine, his hands are soiled with the blood of the innocent."

Thora suddenly shrank away, and hid her eyes. Was the deed she would once have given her life to trace and revenge to be laid bare to her now, just as she longed to escape, to give up her vow, and resurrect her fainting soul? She knew she must listen, and pushed aside the open letter on her table, since the ugly reality of life had again knocked at her door.

Kate watched the girl with understanding eyes.

"You are frightened of what I shall tell you, Miss Sutton, and well you may be. You are a guest in a house of murderers and devils. I unsuspectingly brought you here, for you won my affection by pity and kindness, and I can save you, with a little feminine strategy, a little courage."

A strange smile lighted the hard face,

as she spoke with reticence, out of the silent desert of her despair.

"What harm have I done, that anyone should plot against my life? Mr. Howard warned me I was not safe, but I refused to believe him," said Thora quickly.

It was all so like a dream that she blinked her eyes to make sure she was awake.

"You drew an Elder from the slavery of Mormonism. The fortune you now enjoy was once intended for the Church, which slew the man you loved," said Kate, with harsh bluntness. "Ah! no wonder you tremble and grow pale. The deed must be wiped out in blood, but you, poor child, are too young for vengeance. You dreamed of it once, I know. You betrayed that much to me, when we spoke of the dead man. Shall I ever forget the hour you lay at his side—asleep. The gods, though they seemed cruel, have been good to you all along. Ezra Dyer might any day have been drawn back to the Mormon fold; at least the love you bore him never suffered the gnawing pang or bitter shock of disillusionment. Look at me, a woman betrayed and scorned, the tool of a brute who walks the earth in his 'saintly' robe of hypocrisy. I take from you your burden of retaliation, and lay it beside my own. To me, in this pestilent wasp's nest of Mormonism, comes the refreshing cup of vengeance. I must not tell

you how I shall meet my debts, please ask no questions. It is between me and my God, the God I have trusted so little, and oft-times despised. It seems to me to-night, that the work I have in store is worth the sacrifice of my soul."

Mrs. Sharp looked capable of almost any deed as she breathed the words.

"Nothing is worth that," said Thora, solemnly, "though once I felt as you are feeling now. I suspected my dear one had been cut off through treachery, and the thought of his wrong, and mine, was as fire in the blood. If in that mad hour of desolation, Ezra Dyer's murderer had been delivered into my hands, I dread to think how I should have used my power. Great sorrow unsexes, and turns even a woman's faint heart to fury and violence."

"How I treat my husband," answered Kate, "is no business of yours, Miss Sutton, leave him to me. All I desire now is that you, against whose life he is plotting, even while he entertains you with outward hospitality, should escape unscathed in mind and body. Life drives us straight on, we must follow its course. Will you trust me sufficiently to act as I request, since it is, in a measure, the guest's duty to try and fall in with pre-arranged plans?"

She took Thora by both hands, and gazed into her eyes. The girl read a set purpose of resolve in every feature of the

speaker's face, as she put the question still in the guarded whisper she had adopted from the first.

"Yes, I will trust you. What would you have me do?" gasped Thora, fully aware she had no choice but to follow Mrs. Sharp's instructions.

"Until late to-morrow night, your every movement will be watched by spies. I should advise you, if possible, to stay in during the day, on the plea of a slight cold. I am employing a poor work woman, who will arrive in the afternoon, to make chair covers. She wears an old fashioned hooded cloak, and is bent nearly double with constant sewing. I have purchased a new garment for her, and shall ask her to sell me her ancient cloak, presumably for some theatricals I am arranging. She always stays to dinner here with the servants, as she comes from a distance. I want you to dine with Sidney and myself, and I will take care to drug his wine, so that he falls into a deep sleep, from which he will not wake for many hours. The moment he is insensible, you will slip on a grey wig I have procured, and the worn hooded wrap of the old work woman. I myself will accompany you to the door, and see you off the premises. Walk a few yards up the road, imitating her stoop, and you will find Howard Kelly waiting for you at the corner in a carriage. Drive away with him,

and leave the town immediately. I will try and smuggle some of your luggage away in the morning, in one of my dress boxes, labelled with my name. It will be a busy day, for I have to attend the Endowment House, in order to give Clara Young to my husband. As a mark of special favour he has promised to dine with me on his marriage night. He is only supposed to absent himself from the new wife for a few hours—to honour the old—so you will see my purpose in administering a drug. Clara can wait for her bridegroom, you may be sure I shall detain him as long as I can."

Thora followed every word with deep attention. She could hardly believe Mrs. Sharp was not romancing, as she unfolded the drama of the morrow, and made clear its strange working. It was terrible to contemplate sitting at meat, while the blood-stained hands of Ezra's cousin helped her to food.

She would have liked to leave the house that very night, but Kate persuaded her that the danger was too great. The only safe course was to follow unquestioningly the plan suggested by her hostess.

"I am behind the scenes, and I know," she said. "I went this evening, when Sidney left me to visit Clara, and asked Mr. Kelly to help me. Here is a letter he gave me for you, begging you to be guided by my advice. He knows what the Mormons are, and he

wants to get you away quietly. He highly approved of my method of disguise."

Thora felt a strange, unaccountable thrill creep through her veins, as she took the note, in the now familiar handwriting, and read its contents.

"If I am not very much mistaken," wrote Howard Kelly, "you can trust this poor, suffering Englishwoman up to the hilt. Her affection for you is as sincere, I believe, as her hatred for the Mormons is fierce and appalling. Do not hesitate to join me, I will arrange for a married lady to meet us outside the town, and accompany us on our flight. You are not safe in Utah. If you value your life, you will escape as Mrs. Sharp suggests, ridiculous though it may seem in the 20th century. It is better far to slip away quietly, than for me to surround the house with police, and accuse these people of planning a deed they would stoutly deny. Such a course might involve you in a long and tedious lawsuit. It is surely wiser to be clear of the Mormons, and shake the dust of the city from our feet. I cannot express the horrible anxiety I am suffering on your behalf. I shall not close my eyes until you are safely away from the Sharps' roof to-morrow night.

"Your ever sincere, and much

"troubled friend,

"HOWARD KELLY."

"He thinks you are right," said Thora, still clasping Kate's protecting hand. "I am ready to do as you wish, and oh! if I could only make things better for you, how gladly I would return all your kindness and consideration."

Her voice broke, and the tears rushed to her eyes.

"Some day, perhaps, if ever I return to England, I may re-call those words to you," murmured the woman, with a wistful look that temporarily softened her austere expression, and mellowed the rigid moulding of her features.

It was as if she glanced back into the days of her girlhood, and then gazed on to a possible future, in which Sidney Sharp and Mormonism would be only a black spot of remembrance, far away down the vista of years.

CHAPTER XXIV

"BY THE AUTHORITY OF THE PRIESTHOOD"

ON their way to the Endowment House for his secret wedding ceremony, Sidney informed Kate that she must be especially careful not to let so much as a hint of what was to take place, fall from her lips in the hearing of a Gentile.

"You need to keep this secret," he said, "as rigidly as we shall guard our action of to-night, when the brethren bear away Thora Sutton's body, to be devoured in its shell by destroying flames, which can never reveal their victim's identity. The United States officials here in Utah, would be only too glad to get a record of any polygamous marriage, but we are always too sharp for them! We carefully keep our records where they could never be found by a Gentile Court, and we have been driven to many peculiar tactics to defeat what they, in ignorance, call justice."

"You are certainly to be congratulated on your success," said Kate.

"I pride myself that we are clever enough to evade the chastening hand of even a bigger country than America. Our body is so well organised it could stand against

the world. You don't feel nervous about to-night, my dear brave girl?"

Kate gave him a reassuring look.

"Indeed no, the thought buoys me up. I have no time to remember my old prejudices against your taking another wife, my mind is so full of the great work I shall accomplish this evening, in ridding the world of a scorpion."

Sidney smiled approvingly, her words fell like music on his ear.

"You have taken a strange hatred to Miss Sutton since joining our faith, and it is a good sign," he murmured. "You are learning to despise all the loathsome creatures who would work us ill."

The carriage had drawn up at the door of the Endowment House, and Sidney handed his wife out with marked courtesy, and an affectionate smile. As she joined the company assembled for the ceremony, they seemed to her like phantom images peopling a grotesque and unreal world. The mockery of their attempt to cast the cloak of religion upon so vile a deed made her long to give way to a fit of hysterical laughter, to point the finger of scorn at them, and cry aloud her thoughts. Instead, she mastered the dangerous desire, and braced herself, with an effort, to appear calm. She had been previously schooled by Sidney in the part he wished her to play. She listened unmoved, as the scribe took down the ages,

names, and native towns of the parties concerned. She remembered, as the President told Sidney, Kate, and Clara to stand before him, that he was called "the Prophet, Seer, and Revelator over the whole Church throughout the world," one who alone held the "keys of authority" in this "solemn ordinance."

Kate stood next her husband, while the white robed Miss Young made an ethereal figure on the left of the present Mrs. Sharp. Under Clara's bridal veil, her sparkling eyes glistened with the light of triumph. She rejoiced to think that Kate had failed in attraction to keep the Mormon Elder to herself, and pictured, with supreme satisfaction, the agony of mind this newly made member of their Church suffered in order to be true to the faith.

"A good lesson," she thought, vindictively, "for one who was once in the ranks of the heathen."

The President's voice broke upon Kate's ear, as he put a question to her in ringing accents:—

"Are you willing to give this woman to your husband, to be his lawful and wedded wife for time, and for all eternity? If you are, you will manifest it by placing her right hand within the right hand of your husband."

Kate felt an icy shudder seize her in a death cold vice. She instinctively drew back, and for a moment hesitated. The deed

requested seemed almost too grotesque, too repulsive ! Surely she must raise her voice in protest, to curse and revile these people ! Once more caution came to her aid, and mechanically she joined the waiting hands, taking Sidney's arm, as previously instructed, while the President asked him a solemn question—

"Do you, Brother Sidney, take Sister Clara by the right hand, to receive her to yourself, to be your lawful and wedded wife, and you to be her lawful and wedded husband, for time and for all eternity, with a covenant and promise, on your part, that you will fulfil all the laws, rites, and ordinances, pertaining to this holy matrimony, in the new and everlasting covenant, doing this in the presence of our God, His angels, and these witnesses, of your own free will and choice ?"

Sidney Sharp looked straight into the speaker's eyes, and answered in a loud voice, "Yes."

Then, turning to Clara, the President put a similar question, and she likewise answered, "Yes," in a low fervent whisper, casting her eyes down coyly, with an air of innocence, that struck Kate as peculiarly hypocritical.

Once more, the man who had joined them together, raised his voice to give the blessing they so little deserved :—

"In the Name of the Lord Christ, and

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by the authority of the Holy Priesthood, I pronounce you legally and lawfully husband and wife, for time and for all eternity, and I seal upon you the blessings of the holy resurrection, with power to come forth in the morning of the first resurrection, clothed with glory, immortality, and eternal lives. I seal upon you the blessings of thrones, dominions, principalities, powers, and exaltations, together with the blessings of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and say unto you:—Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth, that you may have joy in your posterity in the day of the Lord. All these blessings I seal upon your heads, through your faithfulness unto the end, by the authority of the Holy Priesthood, in the Name of the everlasting Father. Amen.”

Thus ended the ceremony of sin, for the final word had been spoken, and there was nothing more to say. Once again the scribe entered the date and place of marriage in the general record, with the names of two or three witnesses, while the apostle of the Mormon Church was speaking a special word of congratulation to the blushing bride.

“I hope the service has not been too much of a strain on you,” said Clara’s mother, to Kate Sharp. “It must seem different to one who has not been brought up in our faith, and taught from childhood the propriety of plural marriage.”

She spoke sympathetically, there was a kind, maternal look in her eyes.

"I am one of you now," said the Englishwoman, standing very erect, and staring over the head of Mrs. Young—a short figure in royal blue, with a fashionable hat, that seemed to cause her discomfort.

"Indeed you are, and with us you can realise that these celestial unions are the seed and glory of Mormonism. Even in the face of the nation, we are obliged to continue this divine institution."

"Of course," murmured Kate, and her voice had a strange note which puzzled Mrs. Young.

She was looking at the mild featured woman, Sidney's new mother-in-law, wondering if she really believed in this dastardly organisation, hostile to the Government, steeped in vice, and with its law of "blood atonement"—giving the right to kill. It appeared almost impossible that educated people could remain enslaved by a system of such unspeakable degradation, which violated the sanctity of the American home, and trained its devotees to treason, superstition, and felony.

"You will return with us for our little festivity, I hope," added Mrs. Young, politely.

Kate made a quick sign of refusal, and answered determinedly:—

"Thank you, I have rather a headache, and must beg to be excused."

"Well, you're certainly looking pale, but I guess Sidney will be coming round in the morning to see after you, so don't fret, my dear."

The words were meant in all good feeling, and were accompanied by a friendly smile.

"Yes, he will be coming round," answered Kate, the warm glow of revenge creeping like fire through her veins, as she added under her breath, "a little sooner than you expect."



CHAPTER XXV

HIS WEDDING NIGHT

KATE SHARP waited at the window, listening for every sound, watching, with strained bloodshot eyes for one figure. Possibly, after all, Sidney might fail to come. What if Clara's twining arms held him fast, and refused to let him go, on this his wedding night, even to serve the despotic Mormon Church?

The deserted wife had paced for the last hour up and down the balcony, the beating of her heart keeping time with her measured steps. Now she sat, half concealed by a long crimson curtain, every muscle in her body taut and set, her teeth clenched tightly together, her fingers folded in her palms. She seemed to have lost all sensation, save an intense longing for the arrival of the smiling bridegroom on his errand of death. She conjured up his face as it had appeared to her at the ceremony—outwardly, a bland, contented countenance, revealing to her alone its diabolical mask of deceit. Every moment of delay meant the prolonging of his bliss with the new Mrs. Sharp. How she grudged him his short-lived happiness!

Suddenly she heard the sound of carriage wheels, and then the closing of the hall door. She leaned forward, gasping with relief, and gave vent to a little cry, as the well dressed figure of the Mormon Elder crossed her threshold, on the very eve of his plural marriage. Through strategy he had been drawn from his young bride into the net spread by the injured wife.

"Victory!" she whispered, under her breath, "so the gods have delivered him into my hands."

She could hardly control her excitement, as she braced herself to receive him, forcing her lips to smile.

"You have come for your birthday dinner," she murmured, shuddering at the kiss he pressed on her forehead. "I have told Thora we are to drink your health to-night, and she is coming down to dine, though she has not been very well all day."

"Good," he muttered. "I have left no stone unturned for the working of our plan. I was obliged to part from Clara more than an hour ago, to give final instructions to the men who are to carry the box away. It fastens down splendidly with a spring, and will be put immediately into the flames, symbolical of those undying tongues of fire which shall, in another state, eternally devour our enemy. You got the laudanum I sent you?"

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The cool, calculating words were spoken without a trace of emotion.

"Yes. My brew is ready. I don't think you will have any fault to find with it, when to-night's work is done."

Kate had tried to answer him in the same tone, but found it difficult to control her voice.

"I am sure I shall not, dear child. You daily mount higher and higher to the pinnacle of perfection. All the Young family were praising your gracious behaviour at the wedding. Your dignified manner much impressed them. Mrs. Young greatly feared you might faint, or become hysterical, having only so recently been converted, and initiated into the doctrine of the Lord's servants having many wives."

He patted her on the shoulder approvingly, evidently he was in the best of spirits.

"Did Clara object to your leaving this evening?" she asked, avoiding his eyes.

"Well, I must confess I had some trouble. The poor, dear creature naturally expected my undivided attention for to-night at least. But I have promised to make it up to her in various little ways, and eventually she let me go with quite a good grace. You can well imagine she awaits my return with the eager enthusiasm of a bride who is very much in love."

He squared his shoulders, and turned to glance at himself in a long mirror.

" Naturally, an attractive man like yourself could hardly fail to arouse all that is passionate in her nature. I really believe, Sidney, she fell in love with you that first day I met her in the train, only then I was not sufficiently schooled in your holy faith to see the beauty of it all, as I do now."

Kate was surprised at her own powers of acting, as she played her part.

" If England would give us a few more women like you, how our ranks would be strengthened," he sighed. " Some day, I must send you back on a mission to gather other sisters to the fold, who may be saved by your example."

" Yes," she said, " I think I could save them—if I tried."

" Utah," he murmured, " is God's Zion, her enemies, the American people, her triumph, America's downfall. We must labour to subjugate this continent, even if we have to use the devil's tools for the work of the Lord. Brigham Young boasted, in his inspired comment, that we could beat the world at anything. He said—and said it proudly—' we have the smoothest liars on the face of the earth, the cunningest and most adroit thieves. We pick out Elders who could beat the four Continents at gambling, and shuffle the cards with the smartest rogue on God's footstool. We beat them because we live in the light of the Lord, and hold the keys of His Kingdom.'"



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"Fine words," declared Kate, eyeing her husband with a glance of steel.

"I thought you would appreciate the quotation. Thora Sutton is doomed, because, long before you knew it, I pronounced upon her the curse of Almighty God."

Kate glanced at the clock, it wanted but a few minutes to the fatal dinner hour.

"I will tell Thora you are here."

She moved towards the door as she spoke, with firm step, and head held high.

"One moment. Is everything clear in your mind? Did you read my written instructions thoroughly?"

He stretched out his hand to detain her, letting it fall again to his side, as she bowed assent, answering in a whisper, which only reached his ears:—

"When the body is in the box, I put a red light in the window, and that is the sign for the men to come to bear her away."

He nodded, and turned a trifle pale, for a step outside warned them they had spoken the last word.

"Is that you, Miss Sutton?" cried Kate, in a tone of wild gaiety, as she opened the door.

Thora entered, looking strangely youthful in a soft grey dress. It was the first time she had discarded her unrelieved mourning.

She paused a moment, as if the fact of addressing Sidney, was too hard an effort.

"Good evening," he said, breezily. "I was sorry to hear you were suffering from a slight indisposition. I should have been very disappointed if you had not made the effort to come down and drink my health at my birthday dinner. I would have invited a few friends to meet you, but my wife thought you were still averse to mixing in society."

She tried to reply naturally, but it seemed the most difficult task of her life.

"Oh! I am glad you did not ask anyone. I don't feel very sociable to-night, but I hope to-morrow I shall be much—much—better."

"I think you will. Early to bed, and a good long sleep, eh? Sweet dreams on an easy pillow, that is a cure for many ills."

"Yes, indeed."

She avoided his eyes, and shuddered as he escorted her to the dining-room, laying her hand so lightly on his sleeve, that she could only feel the black cloth of his coat, and not the substance of the merciless member beneath.

"Kate's special brew," he said, "will be served with dessert, when the servants leave us, as I have a fancy always to make a speech on my birthday night, however small the gathering. It is a time when we should think of our first entry into this world, with its numberless opportunities for the working of good or evil. I thank heaven,

year by year, that I have fulfilled all the laws that are written in the Book of Covenants, namely, the Book of Mormon. Some day, all the nations of the earth shall bow down to the teaching of that book. Our Prophet, Joseph Smith, used to say that he would tread down all his enemies, and walk over their dead bodies. Very probably, if he had not been cut off, he might have gathered an army of Saints together, sufficient to seize the United States, and ultimately the whole world."

"You mustn't give Miss Sutton a history lesson," said Kate lightly, "remember she has a headache, and her beliefs are not ours."

"I apologise," declared Sidney, "but out of the fulness of the heart the mouth speaketh. I think I have a large heart to match my soul. When people become Mormons, their souls swell, as if indeed they were going to leap up to the planets."

As Thora listened, a sensation of the most paralysing fear crept over her. She felt certain her white face, and forced manner, must betray her agony of mind.

Kate's revelation of the previous night was calculated to affect the strongest nerves, and strain them on the rack of anticipated evil. The girl mistrusted every mouthful of food she raised to her unwilling lips. The feeling of horrible wickedness—so near to her—was overwhelming. Oh! if only Kate

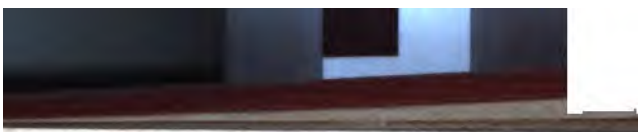
had let her escape earlier in the day, and not insisted upon the ordeal of this ghastly dinner! She knew she was hemmed in, knew that the house was watched, while spies were ready to trace her steps, if she ventured forth undisguised. She fancied at that moment she would have given every penny of her vast fortune to be safely away from Utah, with Howard Kelly to guide and guard her. Muriel's advice haunted her. Why had she not listened? She longed for the affection of friends she could trust, for a sight of England again, for liberty and peace. The slow moments dragged on, conversation died down, and vaguely revived at intervals. Mercifully, the menu was a short one.

As the door finally closed upon the retreating servants, Kate drew a long deep breath, and exchanged a hurried glance with Thora, to whom the tension became almost unbearable, since she wondered how much Mrs. Sharp was keeping back.

Sidney bowed first to Thora, and then to his wife, with an air of importance.

"Fill our glasses, beloved," he said to Kate, "and let me have my few words, before I drink to my two fair companions."

Kate speculated silently, as she fetched the liquid with a hand that knew no trembling, if he intended drinking an unspoken toast to his absent bride. He took the draught from her graciously, and rose to his



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feet, as she bent over Thora, and filled her glass.

"My dear wife," he began, "our friend from afar, whom we yet hope some day through influence and example to draw to the fold, I would drink first and foremost to the salvation of your souls. In our Church we have many 'spiritual gifts' and 'signs.' Our prophets can take up serpents, and receive no harm. This very hand you see before you has touched a poisonous reptile, and remained uninjured, to prove to the Saints my divine apostolic calling."

He paused, his features transformed by an expression of ecstasy, while his eyes glowed red in the shaded crimson light. He raised his hands, as if in blessing. He was thinking how often he had shaken Thora by the hand, and this he called to himself—touching a serpent.

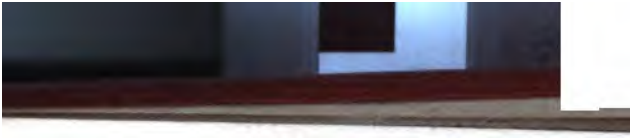
"So," he added at last, "you will see I make no idle boast when I tell you I have found favour in the sight of the Lord, and my every work is an inspiration direct from heaven. I would wish to drink to the memory of our martyred Prophet, Joseph, our great Restorer, who held the keys of the 'Dispensation of the fulness of times'—the chosen vessel, ordained of angels, to be a messenger in the spirit and power of Elijah. Once more we gladly acknowledge that the visions of bygone ages are vouchsafed to men. The fulness of the Gospel is revealed,

we are even given the power of casting out demons."

Once more he glanced towards Thora. She was the devil to be cast out from among the Mormons. At her door lay the unpardonable crime of Ezra's desertion and unfaithfulness. Sidney would feign have prolonged the speech, for his eloquence was not nearly exhausted, had he not remembered, suddenly, it was his wedding night, and that Clara, with her budding beauty, awaited him. Why put off a moment longer the warm welcome of her kisses? To destroy one of the heathen was a blessing and a privilege, but to feel the embrace of a waiting bride, proved even more alluring.

He raised his glass high in the air, and repeated the toast:—"To my most loyal and affectionate wife, the virtuous Kate, to the stranger within our gates, and last, but not least, to the endless reign of the Mormon Church, and the widening of her kingdom.' In return, I ask my wife and our guest, to drink to me on the anniversary of my birth into this glad world of peaceful holy joys."

The liquid reached his lips, Kate watched with staring eyes the movement of his throat as he swallowed. For a moment he staggered, as if struggling to retain his senses, then sank heavily across the chair, his elbows sweeping the table, and causing a clatter of falling glass.



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Kate ran to her prostrate husband, and raised him in her arms.

"Go away," she whispered to Thora, "go quickly. Follow my instructions to the letter—it is your only chance."

The girl glanced back with terrified eyes, as she fled from the room, with a vision of the man's livid face lying against the woman's breast.

Kate knew well no servant would disturb her future course of action. Had not the master himself instructed his Mormon retainers to keep out of the way, and not ask questions?

She looked down upon the immovable features with a thrill of satisfaction, realising the full power of the strong drug Sidney had consumed.

"Clara will have to wait for her bridegroom," she said. "Elder Sharp is detained—on the business of the Church."



CHAPTER XXVI

A FREE WOMAN

THORA ran upstairs, a wild frenzy of terror possessing her. She fancied noiseless feet followed her every step. She dared not look back, and half fell into her room. With quick, agitated hands she drew a box from a locked wardrobe, and pulling out its contents, garbed herself in the old fashioned cloak and wig. She knew Kate would be waiting for her by a side door which led into the courtyard. The motionless face of the insensible Sidney seemed to float before the girl's eyes, wearing a ghostly menace. Once she was almost sure a low laugh, like the chuckle of an evil spirit, hovered on the still air, and echoed through the house.

Creeping down stairs again, equipped for her journey, she met Kate in the dimly lighted corridor.

"Don't speak, even when I speak to you," whispered Mrs. Sharp. "Remember to stoop, even lower than that, the woman is bent nearly double. Walk with a slight limp, if anyone addresses you, put your hand to your ear and mutter. Mind, you are deaf, as well as old, but don't be blind, keep your eyes open, and your wits clear



Sidney is safe asleep in his bed, he cannot harm you now."

She threw back the door. Their two figures were wrapped in shadows on the steps, as they stood side by side in the still night air.

"Be sure you come again to-morrow to finish those chairs, I will pay you then," said Mrs. Sharp loudly, though apparently no one was by to hear the remark.

Thus, Thora was pushed away with a brisk "good-night." Remembering to bend her shoulders, and walk with signs of age, she stumbled along the unfrequented path, a horrible conviction upon her that the night was peopled with eyes, and mysterious inhabitants invaded the darkness. She felt sure a hand would seize her, and drag her back to the house of horror, she thought that footsteps followed her stealthily. In the public road she felt a trifle more secure. No one paid any heed to her, as she limped towards the lights of a distant carriage at the corner of the main thoroughfare. She might have been truly the old crippled woman, for all the attention her presence caused.

A man hurried towards her, and the sight of his familiar figure made him seem like an angel of brightness. Never had human form appeared more welcome.

"Is it you, Miss Sutton?" whispered the voice of Howard Kelly.



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She drew aside her hood, and glanced up at him, with a murmured "Yes." Her eyes spoke the gratitude her tremulous lips were powerless to utter.

He took her arm, and helped her into the carriage. She was shaking from head to foot, and could hardly stand. He saw she was utterly exhausted and unnerved, and as the horses dashed away, he just took her hand, and held it in both his own, with a firm, but tender grasp.

"Poor little girl!" he murmured, "poor little girl!"

She was no longer the wealthy and beautiful heiress to him. In this moment of weakness, she was just a tired child, snatched from the camp of the enemy, into which she had wandered with the foolhardiness of youth.

He could see the tears coursing down her cheeks, as she clung to him in an agony of terror. It was hard to realise the danger was over, even now.

"It's all right," he whispered softly, and his arm stole round her. "You are quite safe. I am here to take care of you, and we are going away, far from all your enemies."

In listening to his words of comfort, she was too human not to feel glad of that protecting touch, which warmed her frozen heart to a flame of glowing life, and the

response of a deeper sentiment even than gratitude.

"Yes, quite safe," she repeated, but her voice still sounded faint, and her eyes wore a dazed expression. The horrors of the night were yet upon her soul, though she realised in her heart no one could hurt her now. Howard Kelly had snatched her from death, and dimly she knew he would guard her always. The knowledge brought a sense of peace as she lay in his arms, with her tired head pillowed on his shoulder.

* * * *

Kate crept back to the dining-room, after watching Thora out of sight. She had previously lifted her husband on the sofa, her early training making it an easy matter to move his apparently lifeless body. Noiselessly she crept to his side, and stood over him, with a strange unholy smile. From a woman, she was suddenly transformed to a phantom creature of the dark world, which held its bloody secrets from the light. Fear became a foreign sensation, like the element of a forgotten storm when the calm sets in. She was high on the pinnacles of revenge, in the rosy dawn of her heart's desire. She watched him in the trance of his drugged sleep, conscious she held the thin thread of his mortal existence.

"As you have made the bed," she whispered, "so must you lie on it. Your feet shall tread in the shoes of your victim,

you have planned your own destruction."

Already she strung together in her mind the advantages of her deed.

The world would be free of one devil the less, while life for her would stretch ahead, without the evil genius of her youth, without the smooth faced murderer, the "saintly" advocate of plural marriage.

"Remember Ezra Dyer," she muttered between her teeth, as she bent over him, and raised his limp form with professional ease—"remember Clara Young, and Nurse Baker—who laughs last!"

She moved slowly with her burden to an adjoining room, where a long open box, the length of a human body, stood ready for its freight of fleshly luggage. Sidney had opened the lid himself to receive the drugged form of Thora Sutton.

Kate staggered slightly as she approached, and kneeling beside the disguised coffin, without allowing herself to pause, deposited her cold burden where the Gentile should have laid.

An Old Testament fury surged in her soul, as she delivered him to death. She felt no sense of personal wrongdoing, she was saving the city, she was trampling corruption, deceit, and abuse, under her heel. He had taught her that to kill was the work of the Lord, she would abide by his teaching.

"You are safe there," she whispered



between her teeth, as she closed the lid with the patent snap he had himself devised. "I place you where the dogs cannot bite you, and where you cannot bite the dogs! I leave you to God's mercy in your Mormon kingdom, where the Latter Day Saints shall gather, with a host of celestial wives, to give an account of their plunder, murder, perjury, and treason. I will meet you at the great tribunal, myself a murderess. Until that hour, good-bye, Sidney Sharp; sleep well, on this your wedding night."

She moved like a walker in a dream, back to the room where they had dined, still feeling utterly devoid of all relationship to humanity—a moving machine, working the scales of fate, urged on by a desire, strong as the fierce winds of the sea, boisterous as the incoming of a swelling tide.

On the mantelshelf a red light gleamed, kindled by Sidney's hand. Following her husband's instructions, Kate raised the signal, and set the glowing flame in the window.

Almost immediately, unseen figures emerged from the bushes without. Their leader opened the hall door with a key, procured previously from Elder Sharp, and with stealthy tread the men mounted the stairs, entering the room where the body lay.

Kate glanced round the corner of the door, and a chief officer advanced to address her.

"We go straight to the cleansing fires,"



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he said. "Have no fear, the work of the Lord is done."

"Amen," she answered, with bent head.

"Good-night, sister," he added, as his men raised the box.

"Good-night," she murmured. "I am afraid you cannot see my husband again this evening."

"No. I suppose he has returned to his bride. He told us he would slip out by the back entrance directly his work was done. He will have great exaltation in heaven, emoluments, powers, wives, and servants. You must be truly proud of him, Sister?"

"Indeed," she replied, "I take God and all His holy angels to witness this night—that I am a proud woman."

She pointed scornfully to the box as she spoke.

The leader of the luggage men motioned them to the door with a sweep of his hand, and an air of majestic authority.

"Away with the accursed thing," he cried. "The angel of the Lord demands that we lose no time in committing it to the destroying fires."

Kate Sharp leaned against the door, listening to their retreating feet, as they crept down the broad stairway. She knew she was safe from detection, knew it—and gloried in the knowledge.

"When they discover Sidney has disappeared," she said, "they will think he

feared his deed, and made haste to escape, but they can never find him. their own destroying fires will have laid his ashes in the dust."

A great sense of freedom stole over her as the hall door closed. She stretched her arms, and drew a long, deep breath of relief. She pictured Thora driving through the night, with Howard Kelly at her side. She pictured Clara—waiting for the bridegroom who would never come.

Alone with the darkness in that still house, she figuratively faced herself, a tense, frigid, unemotional, but strangely satisfied soul.

She had paid back two debts—her own and Thora's. Once more she fancied she stood by Ezra Dyer's bed of death, only now his glazed eyes moved, recognising in her the avenger of his blood.

"Why did you do it?" he asked, in the gloom of the surrounding shadows. "My life was nothing to you."

"Why did I do it," she answered faintly, "can you not guess? I became a Mormon—that explains everything. I was one of them, caught and enchained by the priesthood, bound to an Elder, imprisoned in Utah. Now I can go forth into the world, unfettered by their bonds, a free woman. I must go, presumably, to seek my missing husband. As he feigned sorrow at your loss, I shall feign sorrow at his. He taught

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me well! I merely profit by the example of his perfidy."

The spirit form of Ezra Dyer faded in the shadows of her imagination. She watched it drift away, with a smile upon her lips.

"First you were under the ban," she murmured dreamily, "then you were under the sod, but now (with a glad quickening of her pulses) you are under the footstool of God."

THE END.





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